THE WOMAN THOU GAVEST ME

BEING THE STORY OF
MARY O'NEILL WRITTEN BY
HALL CAINE

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PHILADELPHIA & LONDON
J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY
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THE AUTHOR TO THE READER

HOW much of the story of Mary O'Neill is a work of my own imagination, and how much comes from an authentic source I do not consider it necessary to say. But as I have in this instance drawn more largely and directly from fact than is usually the practice of the novelist, I have thought it my duty to defeat all possible attempts at personal identification by altering and disguising the more important scenes and characters.

MARTIN CONRAD TO THE AUTHOR

HERE are the Memoranda we have talked about. Do as you like with them. Alter, amend, add to or take away from them, exactly as you think best. They were written in the first instance for my own eye alone, and hence they take much for granted which may need explanation before they can be put to the more general uses you have designed for them. Make such explanation in any way you consider suitable. It is my wish that in this matter your judgment should be accepted as mine. The deep feeling you could not conceal when I told you the story of my dear one's life gives me confidence in your discretion.

Whatever the immediate effect may be, I feel that in the end I shall be justified—fully justified—in allowing the public to look for a little while into the sacred confessional of my darling's stainless heart.

I heard her voice again to-day. She was right—love is immortal. God bless her! My ever lovely and beloved one!

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AUTHOR'S NOTE: *The name Raa (of Celtic origin with many variations among Celtic races) is pronounced Rah in Ellan.*

THE NARRATIVE OF MARY O'NEILL

FIRST PART

MY GIRLHOOD

FIRST CHAPTER

"OUT of the depths, O Lord, out of the depths," begins the most beautiful of the services of our church, and it is out of the depths of my life that I must bring the incidents of this story.

I was an unwanted child—unwanted as a girl at all events. Father Dan Donovan, our parish priest, told me all about it. I was born in October. It had been raining heavily all day long. The rain was beating hard against the front of our house and running in rivers down the window-panes. Towards four in the afternoon the wind rose and then the yellow leaves of the chestnuts in the long drive rustled noisily, and the sea, which is a mile away, moaned like a dog in pain.

In my father's room, on the ground floor, Father Dan sat by the fire, fingering his beads and listening to every sound that came from my mother's room, which was immediately overhead. My father himself, with his heavy step that made the house tremble, was tramping to and fro, from the window to the ingle, from the ingle to the opposite wall. Sometimes Aunt Bridget came down to say that everything was going on well, and at intervals of half an hour Doctor Conrad entered in his noiseless way and sat in silence by the fire, took a few puffs from a long clay pipe and then returned to his charge upstairs.

My father's impatience was consuming him.

"It's long," he said, searching the doctor's face.

"Don't worry—above all don't worry," said Father Dan.

"There's no need," said Doctor Conrad.

"Then hustle back and get it over," said my father. "It will be five hundred dollars to you if this comes off all right."

I think my father was a great man at that time. I think he is still a great man. Hard and cruel as he may have been to me, I feel bound to say that for him. If he had been born a king, he would have made his nation feared and perhaps respected throughout the world. He was born a peasant, the poorest of peasants, a crofter. The little homestead of his family, with its whitewashed walls and straw-thatched roof, still stands on the bleak ayre-lands of Ellan, like a herd of mottled cattle crouching together in a storm.

His own father had been a wild creature, full of daring dreams, and the chief of them had centred in himself. Although brought up in a mud cabin, and known as Daniel Neale, he believed that he belonged by lineal descent to the highest aristocracy of his island, the O'Neills of the Mansion House (commonly called the Big House) and the Barons of Castle Raa. To prove his claim he spent his days in searching the registers of the parish churches, and his nights in talking loudly in the village inn. Half in jest and half in earnest, people called him "Neale the Lord." One day he was brought home dead, killed in a drunken quarrel with Captain O'Neill, a dissolute braggart, who had struck him over the temple with a stick. His wife, my grandmother, hung a herring net across the only room of her house to hide his body from the children who slept in the other bed.

There were six of them, and after the death of her husband she had to fend for all. The little croft was hungry land, and to make a sufficient living she used to weed for her more prosperous neighbours. It was ill-paid labour—ninepence a day fine days and sixpence all weathers, with a can of milk twice a week and a lump of butter thrown in now and then. The ways were hard and the children were the first to feel them. Five of them died. "They weren't willing to stay with me," she used to say. My father alone was left to her, and he was another Daniel. As he grew up he was a great help to his mother. I feel sure he loved her. Difficult as it may be to believe it now, I really and truly think that his natural disposition was lovable and generous to begin with.

There is a story of his boyhood which it would be wrong of me not to tell. His mother and he had been up in the mountains cutting gorse and ling, which with turf from the Curragh used to be the crofter's only fuel. They were dragging down a prickly pile of it by a straw rope when, dipping into the high road by a bridge, they crossed the path of a splendid carriage which swirled suddenly out of the drive of the Big House behind two high-spirited bays driven by an English coachman in gorgeous livery. The horses reared and shied at the bundle of kindling, whereupon a gentleman inside the carriage leaned out and swore, and then the brutal coachman, lashing out at the bare-headed woman with his whip, struck the boy on his naked legs.

At the next moment the carriage had gone. It had belonged to the head of the O'Neills, Lord Raa of Castle Raa, whose nearest kinsman, Captain O'Neill, had killed my grandfather, so my poor grandmother said nothing. But her little son, as soon as his smarting legs would allow, wiped his eyes with his ragged sleeve and said:

"Never mind, mammy. You shall have a carriage of your own when I am a man, and then nobody shall never lash you."

His mother died. He was twenty years of age at that time, a large-limbed, lusty-lunged fellow, almost destitute of education but with a big brain and an unconquerable will; so he strapped his chest and emigrated to America. What work he found at first I never rightly knew. I can only remember to have heard that it was something dangerous to human life and that the hands above him dropped off rapidly. Within two years he was a foreman. Within five years he was a partner. In ten years he was a rich man. At the end of five-and-twenty years he was a millionaire, controlling trusts and corporations and carrying out great combines.

I once heard him say that the money tumbled into his chest like crushed oats out of a crown shaft, but what happened at last was never fully explained to me. Something I heard of a collision with the law and of a forced assignment of his interests. All that is material to my story is that at forty-five years of age he returned to Ellan. He was then a changed man, with a hard tongue, a stern mouth, and a masterful lift of the eyebrows. His passion for wealth had left its mark upon him, but the whole island went down before his face like a flood, and the people who had made game of his father came crawling to his feet like cockroaches.

The first thing he did on coming home was to buy up his mother's croft, re-thatch the old house, and put in a poor person to take care of it.

"Guess it may come handy some day," he said.

His next act was worthy of the son of "Neale the Lord." Finding that Captain O'Neill had fallen deeply into debt, he bought up the braggart's mortgages, turned him out of the Big House, and took up his own abode in it.

Twelve months later he made amends, after his own manner, by marrying one of the Captain's daughters. There were two of them. Isabel, the elder, was a gentle and beautiful girl, very delicate, very timid, and most sweet when most submissive, like the woodland herbs which give out their sweetest fragrance when they are trodden on and crushed. Bridget, the younger, was rather homely, rather common, proud of her strength of mind and will

To the deep chagrin of the younger sister, my father selected the elder one. I have never heard that my mother's wishes were consulted. Her father and my father dealt with the marriage as a question of business, and that was an end of the matter. On the wedding day my father did two things that were highly significant. He signed the parish register in the name of Daniel O'Neill by right of Letters Patent; and on taking his bride back to her early home, he hoisted over the tower of his chill grey house the stars and stripes of his once adopted country stitched to the flag of his native island. He had talked less than "Neale the Lord," but he had thought and acted more.

Two years passed without offspring, and my father made no disguise of his disappointment, which almost amounted to disgust. Hitherto he had occupied himself with improvements in his house and estate, but now his restless energies required a wider field, and he began to look about him. Ellan was then a primitive place, and its inhabitants, half landsmen, half seamen, were a simple pious race living in a sweet poverty which rarely descended into want. But my father had magnificent schemes for it. By push, energy and enterprise he would galvanise the island into new life, build hotels, theatres, casinos, drinking halls and dancing palaces, lay out race-courses, construct electric railways to the tops of the mountains, and otherwise transform the place into a holiday resort for the people of the United Kingdom.

"We'll just sail in and make this old island hum," he said, and a number of his neighbours, nothing loth to be made rich by magic—advocates, bankers and insular councillors—joined hands with him in his adventurous schemes.

But hardly had he begun when a startling incident happened. The old Lord Raa of Castle Raa, head of the O'Neills, the same that had sworn at my grandmother, after many years in which he had lived a bad life abroad where he had contracted fatal maladies, returned to Ellan to die. Being a bachelor, his heir would have been Captain O'Neill, but my mother's father had died during the previous winter, and in the absence of direct male issue it seemed likely that both title and inheritance (which, by the conditions of an old Patent, might have descended to the nearest living male through the female line) would go to a distant relative, a boy, fourteen years of age, a Protestant, who was then at school at Eton.

More than ever now my father chewed the cud of his great disappointment. But it is the unexpected that oftenest happens, and one day in the spring, Doctor Conrad, being called to see my mother, who was indisposed, announced that she was about to bear a child.

My father's delight was almost delirious, though at first his happiness was tempered by the fear that the child that was to be born to him might not prove a boy. Even this danger disappeared from his mind after a time, and before long his vanity and his unconquerable will had so triumphed over his common sense that he began to speak of his unborn child as a son, just as if the birth of a male child had been prearranged. With my mother, with Doctor Conrad, and above all with Father Dan, he sometimes went the length of discussing his son's name. It was to be Hugh, because that had been the name of the heads of the O'Neills through all the ages, as far back as the legendary days in which, as it was believed, they had been the Kings of Ellan.

My mother was no less overjoyed. She had justified herself at last, and if she was happy enough at the beginning in the tingling delight of the woman who is about to know the sweetest of human joys, the joy of bearing a child, she acquiesced at length in the accepted idea that her child would be a boy. Perhaps she was moved to this merely by a desire to submit to her husband's will, and to realise his hopes and expectations. Or perhaps she had another reason, a secret reason, a reason that came of her own weakness and timidity as a woman, namely, that the man child to be born of her would be strong and brave and free.

All went well down to the end of autumn, and then alarming news came from Castle Raa. The old lord had developed some further malady and was believed to be sinking rapidly. Doctor Conrad was consulted and he gave it as his opinion that the patient could not live beyond the year. This threw my father into a fever of anxiety. Sending for his advocate, he took counsel both with him and with Father Dan.

"Come now, let us get the hang of this business," he said; and when he realised that (according to the terms of the ancient Patent) if the old lord died before his child was born, his high-built hopes would be in the dust, his eagerness became a consuming fire.

For the first time in his life his excitement took forms of religion and benevolence. He promised that if everything went well he would give a new altar to Our Lady's Chapel in the parish church of St. Mary, a ton of coals to every poor person within a radius of five miles, and a supper to every inhabitant of the neighbouring village who was more than sixty years of age. It was even rumoured that he went so far in secret as to provide funds for the fireworks with which some of his flatterers were to celebrate the forthcoming event, and that one form of illumination was a gigantic frame which, set upon the Sky Hill, immediately in front of our house, was intended to display in brilliant lights the glowing words "God Bless the Happy Heir." Certainly the birth was to be announced by the ringing of the big bell of the tower as signal to the country round about that the appointed festivities might begin.

Day by day through September into October, news came from Castle Raa by secret channels. Morning by morning, Doctor Conrad was sent for to see my mother. Never had the sun looked down on a more gruesome spectacle. It was a race between the angel of death and the angel of life, with my father's masterful soul between, struggling to keep back the one and to hasten on the other.

My father's impatience affected everybody about him. Especially it communicated itself to the person chiefly concerned. The result was just what might have been expected. My mother was brought to bed prematurely, a full month before her time.

SECOND CHAPTER

By six o'clock the wind had risen to the force of a hurricane. The last of the withered leaves of the trees in the drive had fallen and the bare branches were beating together like bundles of rods. The sea was louder than ever, and the bell on St. Mary's Rock, a mile away from the shore, was tolling like a knell under the surging of the waves. Sometimes the clashing of the rain against the window-panes was like the wash of billows over the port-holes of a ship at sea.

"Pity for the poor folk with their fireworks," said Father Dan.

"They'll eat their suppers for all that," said my father.

It was now dark, but my father would not allow the lamps to be lighted. There was therefore no light in his gaunt room except a sullen glow from the fire of peat and logs. Sometimes, in a momentary lull of the storm, an intermittent moan would come from the room above, followed by a dull hum of voices.

"Guess it can't be long now," my father would say.

"Praise the Lord," Father Dan would answer.

By seven the storm was at its height. The roaring of the wind in the wide chimney was as loud as thunder. Save for this the thunderous noise of the sea served to drown all sounds on the land. Nevertheless, in the midst of the clamour a loud rapping was heard at the front door. One of the maidservants would have answered it, but my father called her back and, taking up a lantern, went to the door himself. As quietly as he could for the rush of wind without, he opened it, and pulling it after him, he stepped into the porch.

A man in livery was there on horseback, with another saddled horse beside him. He was drenched through, but steaming with sweat as if he had ridden long and hard. Shouting above the roar of the storm, he said:

"Doctor Conrad is here, is he?"

"He is—what of it?" said my father.

"Tell him he's wanted and must come away with me at once."

"Who says he must?"

"Lord Raa. His lordship is dangerously ill. He wishes to see the doctor immediately."

I think my father must then have gone through a moment of fierce conflict between his desire to keep the old lord alive and his hope of the immediate birth of his offspring. But his choice was quickly made.

"Tell the lord," he cried, "that a woman is here in childbirth, and until she's delivered the doctor cannot come to him."

"But I've brought a horse, and the doctor is to go back with me."

"Give the lord my message and say it is Daniel O'Neill who sends it."

"But his lordship is dying and unless the doctor is there to tap him, he may not live till morning."

"Unless the doctor is here to deliver my wife, my child may be dead before midnight."

"What is the birth of your child to the death of his lordship?" cried the man; but, before the words were well out of his mouth, my father, in his great strength, had laid hold of the reins and swung both horse and rider round about.

"Get yourself to the other side of my gate, or I'll fling you into the road," he cried; and then, returning to the porch, he re-entered the house and clashed the door behind him.

Father Dan used to say that for some moments more the groom from Castle Raa could be heard shouting the name of the doctor to the lighted windows of my mother's room. But his voice was swirled away in the whistling of the wind, and after a while the hoofs of his horses went champing over the gravel in the direction of the gate.

When my father returned to his room, shaking the rain from his hair and beard, he was fuming with indignation. Perhaps a memory of forty years ago was seething in his excited brain.

"The old scoundrel," he said. "He'd like it, wouldn't he? They'd all like it! Which of them wants a son of mine amongst them?"

The roaring night outside became yet more terrible. So loud was the noise from the shore that it was almost as if a wild beast were trying to liberate itself from the womb of the sea. At one moment Aunt Bridget came downstairs to say that the storm was frightening my mother. All the servants of the house were gathered in the hall, full of fear, and telling each other superstitious stories.

Suddenly there came a lull. Rain and wind seemed to cease in an instant. The clamour of the sea became less and the tolling of the bell on St. Mary's Rock died away in the distance. It was almost as if the world, which had been whirling through space, suddenly stood still.

In that moment of silence a deeper moan than usual came from the room overhead. My father dropped into a chair, clasped his hands and closed his eyes. Father Dan rattled his pearl beads and moved his lips, but uttered no sound.

Then a faint sound came from the room overhead. My father opened his eyes and listened. Father Dan held his breath. The sound was repeated, but louder, clearer, shriller than before. There could be no mistaking it now. It was Nature's eternal signal that out of the womb of silence a living soul had been born into the world.

"It's over," said my father.

"Glory be to God and all the Saints!" said Father Dan.

"That'll beat 'em," cried my father, and he leapt to his feet and laughed.

Going to the door of the room, he flung it open. The servants in the hall were now whispering eagerly, and one of them, the gardener, Tom Dug, commonly called Tommy the Mate, stepped out and asked if he ought to ring the big bell.

"Certainly," said my father. "Isn't that what you've been standing by for?"

A few minutes later the bell of the tower began to ring, and it was followed almost immediately by the bell of our parish church, which rang out a merry peal.

"That'll beat 'em, I say," cried my father, and laughing in his triumph he tramped the flagged floor with a firmer step than ever.

All at once the crying of the child ceased and there was a confused rumble of voices overhead. My father stopped, his face straightened, and his voice, which had rung out like a horn, wheezed back like a whistle.

"What's going doing? Where's Conrad? Why doesn't Conrad come to me?"

"Don't worry. He'll be down presently," said Father Dan.

A few minutes passed, in which nothing was said and nothing heard, and then, unable to bear the suspense any longer, my father went to the foot of the staircase and shouted the doctor's name.

A moment later the doctor's footsteps were heard on the stone stairs. They were hesitating, halting, dragging footsteps. Then the doctor entered my father's room. Even in the sullen light of the peat fire his face was white, ashen white. He did not speak at first, and there was an instant of silence, dead silence. Then my father said:

"Well, what is it?"

"It is . . ."

"Speak man! . . . Do you mean it is . . . *dead?*"

"No! Oh no! Not that."

"What then?"

"It is a girl."

"A gir. . . . Did you say a girl?"

"Yes."

"My God!" said my father, and he dropped back into the chair. His lips were parted and his eyes which had been blazing with joy, became fixed on the dying fire in a stupid stare.

Father Dan tried to console him. There were thistles in everybody's crop, and after all it was a good thing to have begotten a girl. Girls were the flowers of life, the joy and comfort of man in his earthly pilgrimage, and many a father who bemoaned his fate when a daughter had been born to him, had lived to thank the Lord for her.

All this time the joy bells had been ringing, and now the room began to be illuminated by fitful flashes of variegated light from the firework-frame on the top of Sky Hill, which (as well as it could for the rain that had soaked it) was sputtering out its mocking legend, "God Bless the Happy Heir."

In his soft Irish voice, which was like a river running over smooth stones, Father Dan went on with his comforting.

"Yes, women are the salt of the earth, God bless them, and when I think of what they suffer that the world may go on, that the generations may not fail, I feel as if I want to go down on my knees and kiss the feet of the first woman I meet in the street. What would the world be without women? Think of St. Theresa! Think of the Blessed Margaret Mary! Think of the Holy Virgin herself. . . ."

"Oh, stow this stuff," cried my father, and leaping to his feet, he began to curse and swear.

"Stop that accursed bell! Is the fool going to ring for ever? Put out those damnable lights, too. Put them out. Are the devils of hell trying to laugh at me?"

With that, and an oath at himself for his folly, my father strode out of the room.

My mother had heard him. Through the unceiled timbers of the floor between them the words of his rage had reached her. She was ashamed. She felt as if she were a guilty thing, and with a low cry of pain she turned to the wall and fainted.

The old lord died the same night. Somewhere towards the dead reaches of the dawn his wicked spirit went to its reckoning, and a month afterwards the new Lord Raa, a boy in an Eton jacket, came over to take possession of his inheritance.

But long before that my father, scoring out his disappointment like an account that was closed, had got to work with his advocates, bankers and insular councillors on his great schemes for galvanising the old island into new life.

THIRD CHAPTER

OUT of the mist and veil of my own memory, as distinguished from Father Dan's, there comes first the recollection of a big room containing a big bed, a big wardrobe, a big dressing table, a big praying-stool with an image of Our Lady on the wall above it, and an open window to which a sparrow used to come in the mornings and chirp.

When I came to recognise and to classify I realised that this was my mother's room, and that the sweet somebody who used to catch me up in her arms when I went tottering on voyages of discovery round the vast place was my mother herself, and that she would comfort me when I fell, and stroke my head with her thin white hand, while she sang softly and rocked me to and fro.

As I have no recollection of ever having seen my mother in any other part of our house, or indeed in any other place except our carriage when we drove out in the sunshine, I conclude that from the time of my birth she had been an invalid.

Certainly the faces which first emerge from the islands of my memory are the cheerful and sunny ones of Doctor Conrad and Father Dan. I recall the soft voice of the one as he used to enter our room after breakfast saying, "How are we this morning ma'am?" And I remember the still softer voice of the other as he said "And how is my daughter to-day?"

I loved both of them, but especially Father Dan, who used to call me his Nanny and say I was the plague and pet of his life, being as full of mischief as a goat. He must have been an old child himself, for I have clear recollection of how, immediately after confessing my mother, he would go down on all fours with me on the floor and play at hide-and-seek around the legs of the big bed, amid squeals and squeaks of laughter. I remember, too, that he wore a long sack coat which buttoned close at the neck and hung loose at the skirts, where there were two large vertical pockets, and that these pockets were my cupboards and drawers, for I put my toys and my doll and even the remnants of my cakes into them to be kept in safe custody until wanted again.

My mother called me Mally veen (Mary dear) and out of love of her only child she must have weaned me late, for I have vague memories of her soft white breasts filled with milk. I slept in a little wickerwork cot placed near her bed, so that she could reach me if I uncovered myself in the night. She used to say I was like a bird, having something birdlike in my small dark head and the way I held it up. Certainly I remember myself as a swift little thing, always darting to and fro on tiptoe, and chirping about our chill and rather cheerless house.

If I was like a bird my mother was like a flower. Her head, which was small and fair, and her face, which was nearly always tinged with colour, drooped forward from her delicate body like a rose from its stalk. She was generally dressed in black, I remember, but she wore a white lace collar as well as a coif such as we see in old pictures, and when I call her back to my mind, with her large liquid eyes and her sweet soft mouth, I think it cannot be my affection alone, or the magic of my childish memory, which makes me think, after all these years and all the countries I have travelled in, and all the women I have seen, that my darling mother, though so little known and so little loved, was the most beautiful woman in the world.

Even yet I cannot but wonder that other people, my father especially, did not see her with my eyes. I think he was fond of her after his own fashion, but there was a kind of involuntary contempt in his affection, which could not conceal itself from my quick little eyes. She was visibly afraid of him, and was always nervous and timid when he came into our room with his customary salutation,

"How now, Isabel? And how's this child of yours?"

From my earliest childhood I noticed that he always spoke of me as if I had been my mother's child, not his, and perhaps this affected my feeling for him from the first.

I was in terror of his loud voice and rough manner, the big bearded man with the iron grey head and the smell of the fresh air about his thick serge clothes. It was almost as if I had conceived this fear before my birth, and had brought it out of the tremulous silence of my mother's womb.

My earliest recollections are of his muffled shout from the room below, "Keep your child quiet, will you?" when I was disturbing him over his papers by leaping and skipping about the floor. If he came upstairs when I was in bed I would dive under the bedclothes, as a duck dives under water, and only come to the surface when he was gone. I am sure I never kissed my father or climbed on to his knee, and that during his short visits to our room I used to hold my breath and hide my head behind my mother's gown.

I think my mother must have suffered both from my fear of my father and from my father's indifference to me, for she made many efforts to reconcile him to my existence. Some of her innocent schemes, as I recall them now, seem very sweet but very pitiful. She took pride, for instance, in my hair, which was jet black even when I was a child, and she used to part it in the middle and brush it smooth over my forehead in the manner of the Madonna, and one day, when my father was with us, she drew me forward and said:

"Don't you think our Mary is going to be very pretty? A little like the pictures of Our Lady, perhaps—don't you think so, Daniel?"

Whereupon my father laughed rather derisively and answered:

"Pretty, is she? Like the Virgin, eh? Well, well!"

I was always fond of music, and my mother used to teach me to sing to a little upright piano which she was allowed to keep in her room, and on another day she said:

"Do you know our Mary has such a beautiful voice, dear? So sweet and pure that when I close my eyes I could almost think it is an angel singing."

Whereupon my father laughed as before, and answered:

"A voice, has she? Like an angel's, is it? What next, I wonder?"

My mother made most of my clothes. There was no need for her to do so, but in the absence of household duties I suppose it stimulated the tenderness which all mothers feel in covering the little limbs they love; and one day, having made a velvet frock for me, from a design in an old pattern book of coloured prints, which left the legs and neck and arms very bare, she said:

"Isn't our Mary a little lady? But she will always look like a lady, whatever she is dressed in."

And then my father laughed still more contemptuously and replied,

"Her grandmother weeded turnips in the fields though—ninepence a day dry days, and sixpence all weathers."

My mother was deeply religious, never allowing a day to pass without kneeling on her prayer-stool before the image of the Virgin, and one day I heard her tell my father that when I was a little mite, scarcely able to speak, she found me kneeling in my cot with my doll perched up before me, moving my lips as if saying my prayers and looking up at the ceiling with a rapt expression.

"But she has always had such big, beautiful, religious eyes, and I shouldn't wonder if she becomes a Nun some day!"

"A nun, eh? Maybe so. But I take no stock in the nun business anyway," said my father.

Whereupon my mother's lips moved as if she were saying "No, dearest," but her dear, sweet pride was crushed and she could go no farther.

FOURTH CHAPTER

There was a whole colony on the ground floor of our house who, like my father, could not reconcile themselves to my existence, and the head of them was Aunt Bridget.

She had been married, soon after the marriage of my mother, to one Colonel MacLeod, a middle-aged officer on half-pay, a widower, a Belfast Irishman, and a tavern companion of my maternal grandfather. But the Colonel had died within a year, leaving Aunt Bridget with one child of her own, a girl, as well as a daughter of his wife by the former marriage. As this happened about the time of my birth, when it became obvious that my mother was to be an invalid, my father invited Aunt Bridget to come to his house as housekeeper, and she came, and brought her children with her.

Her rule from the outset had been as hard as might have been expected from one who prided herself on her self-command—a quality that covered everybody, including my mother and me, and was only subject to softening in favour of her own offspring.

Aunt Bridget's own daughter, a year older than myself, was a fair child with light grey eyes, round cheeks of the colour of ripe apples, and long yellow hair that was carefully combed and curled. Her name was Betsy, which was extended by her mother to Betsy Beauty. She was usually dressed in a muslin frock with a sash of light blue ribbon, and being understood to be delicate was constantly indulged and nearly always eating, and giving herself generally the airs of the daughter of the house.

Aunt Bridget's step-daughter, ten years older, was a gaunt, ungainly girl with red hair and irregular features. Her name was Nessy, and, having an instinctive sense of her dependent position, she was very humble and subservient and, as Tommy the Mate used to say, "as smooth as an old threepenny bit" to the ruling powers, which always meant my Aunt, but spiteful, insolent, and acrid to anybody who was outside my Aunt's favour, which usually meant me.

Between my cousin and myself there were constant feuds, in which Nessy MacLeod never failed to take the side of Betsy Beauty, while my poor mother became a target for the shafts of Aunt Bridget, who said I was a wilful, wicked, underhand little vixen, and no wonder, seeing how disgracefully I was indulged, and how shockingly I was being brought up.

These skirmishes went on for a considerable time without consequences, but they came at last to a foolish climax which led to serious results.

Even my mother's life had its gleams of sunshine, and flowers were a constant joy to her. Old Tommy, the gardener, was aware of this, and every morning sent up a bunch of them, freshly cut and wet with the dew. But one day in the spring he could not do so, being out in the dubs of the Curragh, cutting peat for the fires. Therefore I undertook to supply the deficiency, having already, with the large solemnity of six, begun to consider it my duty to take charge of my mother.

"Never mind, mammy, I'll setch some slowers sor you," I said (every *f* being an *s* in those days), and armed with a pair of scissors I skipped down to the garden.

I had chosen a bed of annuals because they were bright and fragrant, and was beginning to cut some "gilvers" when Nessy MacLeod, who had been watching from a window, came bouncing down me.

"Mary O'Neill, how dare you?" cried Nessy. "You wilful, wicked, underhand little vixen, what will your Aunt Bridget say? Don't you know this is Betsy Beauty's bed, and nobody else is to touch it?"

I began to excuse myself on the ground of my mother and Tommy the Mate, but Nessy would hear no such explanation.

"Your mamma has nothing to do with it. You know quite well that your Aunt Bridget manages everything in this house, and nothing can be done without her."

Small as I was that was too much for me. Somewhere in my little heart there had long been a secret pang of mortified pride—how born I do not know—at seeing Aunt Bridget take the place of my mother, and now, choking with vexation but without saying a word, I swept off the heads of all the flowers in the bed, and with my arms full of them—ten times more than I wanted—I sailed back to my mother's room.

Inside two minutes there was a fearful tumult. I thought I was doomed to punishment when I heard the big bunch of keys, which Aunt Bridget kept suspended from her waist, come jingling up the stairs, but it was my poor mother who paid the penalty.

"Isabel," cried Aunt Bridget, "I hope you are satisfied with your child at last."

"What has Mary been doing now, dear?" said my mother.

"Don't ask me what she has been doing. You know quite well, or if you don't you ought to."

My mother glanced at the flowers and she seemed to understand what had happened, for her face fell and she said submissively,

"Mary has done wrong, but I am sure she is sorry and will never do it again."

"Sorry, indeed!" cried my Aunt. "Not she sorry. And she'll do it again at the very next opportunity. The vixen! The little wilful, underhand vixen! But what wonder if children go wrong when their own mothers neglect to correct them."

"I daresay you are quite right, dear Bridget—you are always right," said my mother in a low, grave voice. "But then I'm not very well, and Mary is all I have, you know."

My mother was in tears by this time, but Aunt Bridget was not content with her triumph. Sweeping downstairs she carried her complaint to my father, who ordered that I was to be taken out of my mother's charge on the ground that she was incapable of attending to my upbringing—a task which, being assigned to my Aunt Bridget, provided that I should henceforward live on the ground floor and eat oaten cake and barley bonnag and sleep alone in the cold room over the hall while Betsy Beauty ate wheaten bread and apple tart and slept with her mother in the room over the kitchen in which they always kept a fire.

FIFTH CHAPTER

THE altered arrangements were a cause of grief to my mother, but I am bound to confess that for me they had certain compensations. One of them was the greater ease with which I could slip out to Tommy the Mate, who had been a sailor before he was a gardener, and was still a fine old salt, with grizzled beard and shaggy eyebrows, and a merry twinkle in what he called his "starboard" eye.

I think Tommy was one of the few about my father's house who were really fond of me, but perhaps that was mainly because he loathed Aunt Bridget. He used to call her the Big Woman, meaning that she was the master and mistress of everything and everybody about the place. When he was told of any special piece of her tyranny to servant or farmhand he used to say: "Aw, well, she'll die for all"; and when he heard how she had separated me from my mother, who had nothing else to love or live for, he spat sideways out of his mouth and said:

"Our Big Woman is a wicked devil, I'm thinking, and I wouldn't trust [shouldn't wonder] but she'll burn in hell."

What definite idea I attached to this denunciation I do not now recall, but I remember that it impressed me deeply, and that many a night afterwards, during the miserable half-hours before I fell asleep with my head under the clothes in the cold bedroom over the hall to which (as Nessy MacLeod had told me) the bad fairies came for bad children, I repeated the strange words again and again.

Another compensation was the greater opportunity I had for cultivating an acquaintance which I had recently made with the doctor's son, when he came with his father on visits to my mother. As soon as the hoofs of the horse were heard on the gravel, and before the bell could be rung, I used to dart away on tiptoe, fly through the porch, climb into the gig and help the boy to hold the reins while his father was upstairs.

This led to what I thought a great discovery. It was about my mother. I had always known my mother was sick, but now I got a "skute" (as old Tommy used to say) into the cause of her illness. It was a matter of milk. The doctor's boy had heard his father saying so. If my mother could only have milk morning, noon and night, every day and all day, "there wouldn't be nothing the matter with her."

This, too, impressed me deeply, and the form it took in my mind was that "mammy wasn't sed enough," a conclusion that gained colour from the fact that I saw Betsy Beauty perched up in a high chair in the dining-room twice or thrice a day, drinking nice warm milk fresh from the cow. We had three cows, I remember, and to correct the mischief of my mother's illness, I determined that henceforth she should not have merely more of our milk—she should have all of it.

Losing no time in carrying my intentions into effect, I crept into the dairy as soon as the dairymaid had brought in the afternoon's milking. There it was, still frothing and bubbling in three great bowls, and taking up the first of them in my little thin arms—goodness knows how—I made straight for my mother's room.

But hardly had I climbed half-way up the stairs, puffing and panting under my burden, when I met Nessy MacLeod coming down, and she fell on me with her usual reproaches.

" Mary O'Neill, you wilful, underhand little vixen, whatever are you doing with the milk?"

Being in no mood for explanations I tried to push past, but Nessy prevented me.

"No, indeed, you shan't go a step further. What will your Aunt Bridget say? Take the milk back, miss, this very minute."

Nessy's loud protest brought Betsy Beauty out of the dining-room, and in a moment my cousin, looking more than ever like a painted doll in her white muslin dress with a large blue bow in her yellow hair, had run upstairs to assist her step-sister.

I was now between the two, the one above and the other below, and they laid hold of my bowl to take it from me. They tugged and I resisted and there was a struggle in which the milk was in danger of being spilled.

"She's a stubborn little thing and she ought to be whipped," cried Nessy.

"She's stealing my milk, and I'll tell mamma," said Betsy.

"Tell her then," I cried, and in a burst of anger at finding myself unable to recover control of my bowl I swept it round and flung its contents over my cousin's head, thereby drenching her with the frothing milk and making the staircase to run like a river of whitewash.

Of course there was a fearful clamour. Betsy Beauty shrieked and Nessy bellowed, whereupon Aunt Bridget came racing from her parlour, while my mother, white and trembling, halted to the door of her room.

"Mally, Mally, what have you done?" cried my mother, but Aunt Bridget found no need of questions. After running upstairs to her dripping daughter, wiping her down with a handkerchief, calling her "my poor darling," and saying, "Didn't I tell you to have nothing more to do with that little vixen?" she fell on my mother with bitter upbraidings.

"Isabel, I hope you see now what your minx of a child is—the little spiteful fury!"

By this time I had dropped my empty bowl on the stairs and taken refuge behind my mother's gown, but I heard her timid voice trying to excuse me, and saying something about my cousin and a childish quarrel.

"Childish quarrel, indeed!" cried my Aunt; "there's nothing childish about that little imp, nothing. And what's more, I shall be obliged to you, Isabel, if you will never again have the assurance to speak of my Betsy Beauty in the same breath with a child of yours."

That was more than I could bear. My little heart was afire at the humiliation put upon my mother. So stepping out to the head of the stairs, I shouted down in my shrillest treble:

"Your Betsy Beauty is a wicked devil, and I wouldn't trust but she'll burn in hell!"

Never, to the last hour of my life, shall I forget the effect of that pronouncement. One moment Aunt Bridget stood speechless in the middle of the stairs, as if all breath had been broken out of her. Then, ghastly white and without a word, she came flying up at me, and, before I could recover my usual refuge, she caught me, slapped me on the cheek and boxed both my ears.

I do not remember if I cried, but I know my mother did, and that in the midst of the general tumult my father came out of his room and demanded in a loud voice, which seemed to shake the whole house, to be told what was going on.

Aunt Bridget told him, with various embellishments, which my mother did not attempt to correct, and then, knowing she was in the wrong, she began to wipe her eyes with her wet handkerchief, and to say she could not live any longer where a child was encouraged to insult her.

"I have to leave this house—I have to leave it to-morrow," she said.

"You don't have to do no such thing," cried my father. "But I'm just crazy to see if a man can't be captain in his own claim. These children must go to school. They must all go—the darned lot of 'em."

SIXTH CHAPTER

Before I speak of what happened at school, I must say how and when I first became known to the doctor's boy.

It was during the previous Christmastide. On Christmas Eve I awoke in the dead of night with the sense of awakening in another world. The church-bells were ringing, and there was singing outside our house, under the window of my mother's room. After listening for a little while I made my voice as soft as I could and said:

"Mamma, what is it?"

"Hush, dear! It is the Waits. Lie still and listen," said my mother.

I lay as long as my patience would permit, and then creeping over to the window I saw a circle of men and women, with lanterns, and the frosty air smoking about their red faces. After a while they stopped singing, and then the chain of our front door rattled, and I heard my father's loud voice asking the singers into the house.

They came in, and when I was back in bed, I heard them talking and then laughing in the room below, with Aunt Bridget louder than all the rest, and when I asked what she was doing my mother told me she was serving out bunloaf and sherry-wine.

I fell asleep before the incident was over, but as soon as I awoke in the morning I conceived the idea of singing the Waits myself. Being an artful little thing I knew that my plan would be opposed, so I said nothing about it, but I got my mother to play and sing the carol I had heard overnight, until my quick ear had mastered both tune and words, and when darkness fell on Christmas night I proceeded to carry out my intention.

In the heat of my impatience I forgot to put on cloak or hat, and stealing out of the house I found myself in the carriage drive with nothing on but a pair of thin slippers and the velvet frock that left my neck and arms so bare. It was snowing, and the snow-flakes were whirling round me and making me dizzy, for in the light from my mother's window they seemed to come up from the ground as well as down from the sky.

When I got out of the light of the window, it was very dark, and I could only see that the chestnuts in the drive seemed to have white blankets on them which looked as if they had been hung out to dry. It was a long time before I got to the gate, and then I had begun to be nervous and to have half a mind to turn back. But the thought of the bunloaf and the sherry-wine buoyed me up, and presently I found myself on the high road, crossing a bridge and turning down a lane that led to the sea, whose moaning a mile away was the only sound I could hear.

I knew quite well where I was going to. I was going to the doctor's house. It was called Sunny Lodge, and it was on the edge of Yellow Gorse Farm. I had seen it more than once when I had driven out in the carriage with my mother, and had thought how sweet it looked with its whitewashed walls and brown thatched roof and the red and white roses which grew over the porch.

I was fearfully cold before I got there. The snow was in my slippers and down my neck and among the thickening masses of my hair. At one moment I came upon some sheep and lambs that were sheltering under a hedge, and they bleated in the silence of the night.

But at last I saw the warm red windows of the doctor's cottage, and coming to the wicket gate, I pushed it open though it was clogged with snow, and stepped up to the porch. My teeth were now chattering with cold, but as well as I could I began to sing, and in my thin and creachy voice I had got as far as—

"Ch'ist was born in Bef-lem,
Ch'ist was born in Bef-lem,
Ch'ist was born in Bef-lem,
An' in a manger laid. . . ."

when I heard a rumbling noise inside the house.

Immediately afterwards the door was opened upon me, and a woman whom I knew to be the doctor's wife looked down into my face with an expression of bewilderment, and then cried:

"Goodness gracious me, doctor—if it isn't little Mary O'Neill, God bless her!"

"Bring her in at once, then," said the voice of Doctor Conrad from within, and at the next moment I found myself in a sort of kitchen-parlour which was warm with a glowing turf fire that had a kettle singing over it, and cosy and bright with a ragwork hearth-rug, a dresser full of blue pottery and a sofa settle covered with red cloth.

I suppose the sudden change to a warm room must have caused me to faint, for I have no recollection of what happened next, except that I was sitting on somebody's lap and that she was calling me *boght millish* (little sweet) and *veg-veen* (little dear) while she rubbed my half-frozen limbs and did other things that were, I am sure, all womanly and good.

When I came to myself Doctor Conrad was saying I would have to sleep there that night, and he must go over to the Big House and tell my mother what had happened. He went, and by the time he came back, I had been bathed in a dolly-tub placed in front of the fire, and was being carried upstairs (in a nightdress many sizes too large for me) to a little dimity-white bedroom, where the sweet smelling "scraas" under the sloping thatch of the roof came down almost to my face.

I know nothing of what happened during the night, except that I was feeling very hot, and that as often as I opened my eyes the doctor's wife was leaning over me and speaking in a soft voice that seemed far away. But next day I felt cooler and then Aunt Bridget came in her satin mantle and big black hat, and said something, while standing at the end of my bed, about people paying the penalty when they did things that were sly and underhand.

Towards evening I was much easier, and when the doctor came in to see me at night he said:

"How are we this evening? Ah, better, I see. Distinctly better!"

And then turning to his wife he said:

"No need to stay up with her to-night, Christian Ann."

"But won't the *boght millish* be afraid to be left alone?" she asked.

I said I shouldn't, and she kissed me and told me to knock at the wall if I wanted anything. And then, with her husband's arm about her waist, the good soul left me to myself.

I don't know how I knew, but I did know that that house was a home of love. I don't know how I knew, but I did know, that that sweet woman, who had been the daughter of a well-to-do man, had chosen the doctor out of all the men in the world when he was only a medical student fresh from Germany or Switzerland. I don't know how I knew, but I did know, that leaving father and mother and a sheltered home she had followed her young husband when he first came to Ellan without friends or connections, and though poor then and poor still, she had never regretted it. I don't know how I knew, but I did know, that all this was the opposite of what had happened to my own dear mother, who having everything yet had nothing, while this good creature having nothing yet had all.

SEVENTH CHAPTER

When I awoke next morning the sun was shining, and, after my hair had been brushed smooth over my forehead, I was sitting up in bed, eating for breakfast the smallest of bantam eggs with the smallest of silver spoons, when the door opened with a bang and a small figure tumbled into my room.

It was a boy, two years older than myself. He wore a grey Norfolk jacket and knickerbockers, but the peculiarity of his dress was a white felt hat of enormous size, which, being soiled and turned down in the brim, and having a hole in the crown with a crop of his brown hair sticking through it, gave him the appearance of a damaged mushroom.

Except that on entering he tipped up his head so that I saw his face, which was far from beautiful and yet had two big blue eyes—as blue as the bluest sea—he took no notice of my presence, but tossed a somersault in the middle of the floor, screwed his legs over the back of a chair, vaulted over a table and finally stood on his hands with his legs against the wall opposite to my bed, and his inverted countenance close to the carpet.

In this position, in which he was clearly making a point of remaining as long as possible, while his face grew very red, we held our first conversation. I had hitherto sat propped up as quiet as a mouse, but now I said:

"Little boy, what's your name?"

"Mart," was the answer.

"Where do you come from?"

"Spitzbergen."

I cannot remember that this intelligence astonished me, for when the inverted face had become scarlet, and the legs went down and the head came up, and my visitor tossed several somersaults over the end of my bed, to the danger of my breakfast tray, and then, without a word more, tumbled out of the room, I was still watching in astonishment.

I did not know at that time that these were the ways which since the beginning of the world have always been employed by savages and boys when they desire to commend themselves to the female of their kind, so that when the doctor's wife came smiling upstairs I asked her if the little boy who had been to see me was not quite well.

"Bless you, yes, dear, but that's his way," she said, and then she told me all about him.

His name was Martin Conrad and he was her only child. His hat, which had awakened my interest, was an old one of his father's, and it was the last thing he took off when he undressed for bed at night and the first thing he put on in the morning. When the hole came into its crown his mother had tried to hide it away but he had always found it, and when she threw it into the river he had fished it out again.

He was the strangest boy, full of the funniest fancies. He used to say that before he was born he lived in a tree and was the fellow who turned on the rain. It was with difficulty that he could be educated, and every morning on being awakened, he said he was "sorry he ever started this going to school." As a consequence he could not read or write as well as other boys of his age, and his grammar was still that of the peasant people with whom he loved to associate.

Chief among these was our gardener, old Tommy the Mate, who lived in a mud cabin on the shore and passed the doctor's house on his way to work. Long ago Tommy had told the boy a tremendous story. It was about Arctic exploration and an expedition he had joined in search of Franklin. This had made an overpowering impression on Martin, who for months afterwards would stand waiting at the gate until Tommy was going by, and then say:

"Been to the North Pole to-day, Tommy?"

Whereupon Tommy's "starboard eye" would blink and he would answer:

"Not to-day boy. I don't go to the North Pole more nor twice a day now."

"Don't you, though?" the boy would say, and this would happen every morning.

But later on Martin conceived the idea that the North Pole was the locality immediately surrounding his father's house, and every day he would set out on voyages of exploration over the garden, the road and the shore, finding, by his own account, a vast world of mysterious things and undiscovered places. By some means—nobody knew how—the boy who could not learn his lessons studied his father's German atlas, and there was not a name in it north of Spitzbergen which he had not got by heart. He transferred them all to Ellan, so that the Sky Hill became Greenland, and the Black Head became Franz Josef Land, and the Nun's Well became Behring Strait, and Martha's Gullet became New Siberia, and St. Mary's Rock, with the bell anchored on it, became the pivot of the earth itself.

He could swim like a fish and climb a rock like a lizard, and he kept a log-book, on the back pages of the Doctor's book of visits, which he called his "diarrhea." And now if you lost him you had only to look up to the ridge of the roof, or perhaps on to the chimney stack, which he called his crow's nest, and there you found him, spying through his father's telescope and crying out:

"Look-out ahead! Ice floes from eighty-six latitude fourteen point north, five knots to the larboard bow."

His mother laughed until she cried when she told me all this, but there is no solemnity like that of a child, and to me it was a marvellous story. I conceived a deep admiration for the doctor's boy, and saw myself with eyes of worship walking reverently by his side. I suppose my poor lonely heart was hungering after comradeship, for being a sentimental little ninny I decided to offer myself to the doctor's boy as his sister.

The opportunity was dreadfully long in coming. It did not come until the next morning, when the door of my room flew open with a yet louder bang than before, and the boy entered in a soap-box on wheels, supposed to be a sledge, and drawn by a dog, an Irish terrier, which being red had been called William Rufus. His hat was tied over his ears with a tape from his mother's apron, and he wore a long pair of his father's knitted stockings which covered his boots and came up to his thighs.

He did not at first take any more notice of me than on the previous day, but steering his sledge round the room he shouted to his dog that the chair by the side of my bed was a glacier and the sheep-skin rug was floating ice.

After a while we began to talk, and then, thinking my time had come, I tried to approach my subject. Being such a clever little woman I went artfully to work, speaking first about my father, my mother, my cousin, Nessy MacLeod, and even Aunt Bridget, with the intention of showing how rich I was in relations, so that he might see how poor he was himself.

I felt myself a bit of a hypocrite in all this, but the doctor's boy did not know that, and I noticed that as I passed my people in review he only said "Is she any good?" or "Is he a stunner?"

At length my great moment came and with a fluttering heart I took it.

"Haven't you got a sister?" I said.

"Not *me!*" said the doctor's boy, with a dig of emphasis on the last word which cut me to the quick.

"Wouldn't you like to have one?"

"Sisters isn't no good," said the doctor's boy, and he instanced "chaps" at school—Jimmy Christopher and others—whose sisters were afraid of everything—lobsters and crabs and even the sea.

I knew I was as timid as a hare myself, but my lonely little heart was beginning to bleed, and as well as I could for my throat which was choking me, I said:

"I'm not afraid of the sea—not crabs neither."

In a moment the big mushroom hat was tipped aside and the sea-blue eyes looked aslant at me.

"Isn't you, though?"

"No."

That did it. I could see it did. And when a minute afterwards, I invited the doctor's boy into bed, he came in, stockings and all, and sat by my right side, while William Rufus, who had formed an instant attachment for me, lay on my left with his muzzle on my lap.

Later the same day, my bedroom door being open, so that I might call downstairs to the kitchen, I heard the doctor's boy telling his mother what I was. I was a "stunner."

EIGHTH CHAPTER

From that day forward the doctor's boy considered that I belonged to him, but not until I was sent to school, with my cousin and her stepsister, did he feel called upon to claim his property.

It was a mixed day-school in the village, and it was controlled by a Board which had the village butcher as its chairman. The only teacher was a tall woman of thirty, who plaited her hair, which was of the colour of flax, into a ridiculous-looking crown on the top of her head. But her expression, I remember, was one of perpetual severity, and when she spoke through her thin lips she clipped her words with great rapidity, as if they had been rolls of bread which were being chopped in a charity school.

Afterwards I heard that she owed her position to Aunt Bridget, who had exercised her influence through the chairman, by means of his account with the Big House. Perhaps she thought it her duty to display her gratitude. Certainly she lost no time in showing me that my character had gone to school before me, for in order that I might be directly under her eye, she placed me in the last seat in the lowest class, although my mother's daily teaching would have entitled me to go higher.

I dare say I was, as Father Dan used to say, as full of mischief as a goat, and I know I was a chatterbox, but I do not think I deserved the fate that followed.

One day, not more than a week after we had been sent to school, I held my slate in front of my face while I whispered something to the girl beside and the girl behind me. Both began to titter.

"Silence!" cried the schoolmistress, who was sitting at her desk, but I went on whispering and the girls began to choke with laughter.

I think the schoolmistress must have thought I was saying something about herself—making game, perhaps, of her personal appearance—for after a moment she said, in her rapid accents:

"Mary O'Neill, please repeat what you have just been saying."

I held my slate yet closer to my face and made no answer.

"Don't you hear, miss? Speak! You've a tongue in your head, haven't you?"

But still I did not answer, and then the schoolmistress said:

"Mary O'Neill, come forward."

She had commanded me like a dog, and like a dog I was about to obey when I caught sight of Betsy Beauty's face, which, beaming with satisfaction, seemed to be saying: "Now, we shall see."

I would not stir after that, and the schoolmistress, leaving her desk, came towards me, and looking darkly into my face, said:

"You wilful little vixen, do you think you can trifle with me? Come out, miss, this very moment."

I knew where that language came from, so I made no movement.

"Don't you hear? Or do you suppose that because you are pampered and spoiled by a foolish person at home, you can defy *me?*"

That reflection on my mother settled everything. I sat as rigid as a rock.

Then pale as a whitewashed wall, and with her thin lips tightly compressed, the schoolmistress took hold of me to drag me out of my seat, but with my little nervous fingers I clung to the desk in front of me, and as often as she tore one of my hands open the other fixed itself afresh.

"You minx! We'll see who's mistress here. . . . Will none of you big girls come and help me?"

With the utmost alacrity one big girl from a back bench came rushing to the schoolmistress' assistance. It was Nessy MacLeod, and together, after a fierce struggle, they tore me from my desk, like an ivy branch from a tree, and dragged me into the open space in front of the classes. By this time the schoolmistress' hands, and I think her neck were scratched, and from that cause also she was quivering with passion.

"Stand there, miss," she said, "and move from that spot at your peril."

My own fury was now spent, and in the dead silence which had fallen on the entire school, I was beginning to feel the shame of my ignominious position.

"Children," cried the schoolmistress, addressing the whole of the scholars, "put down your slates and listen."

Then, as soon as she had recovered her breath she said, standing by my side and pointing down to me:

"This child came to school with the character of a wilful, wicked little vixen, and she has not belied her character. By gross disobedience she has brought herself to where you see her. 'Spare the rod, spoil the child,' is a scriptural maxim, and the foolish parents who ruin their children by over-indulgence deserve all that comes to them. But there is no reason why other people should suffer, and, small as this child is she has made the life of her excellent aunt intolerable by her unlovable, unsociable, and unchildlike disposition. Children, she was sent to school to be corrected of her faults, and I order you to stop your lessons while she is publicly punished. . . .''

With this parade of the spirit of justice, the schoolmistress stepped back and left me. I knew what she was doing—she was taking her cane out of her desk which stood by the wall. I heard the desk opened with an impatient clash and then closed with an angry bang. I was as sure as if I had had eyes in the back of my head, that the schoolmistress was holding the cane in both hands and bending it to see if it was lithe and limber.

I felt utterly humiliated. Standing there with all eyes upon me I was conscious of the worst pain that enters into a child's experience—the pain of knowing that other children are looking upon her degradation. I thought of Aunt Bridget and my little heart choked with anger. Then I thought of my mother and my throat throbbed with shame. I remembered what my mother had said of her little Mary being always a little lady, and I felt crushed at the thought that I was about to be whipped before all the village children.

At home I had been protected if only by my mother's tears, but here I was alone, and felt myself to be so little and helpless. But just as my lip was beginning to drop, at the thought of what my mother would suffer if she saw me in this position of infamy, and I was about to cry out to the schoolmistress: "Don't beat me! Oh! please don't beat me!'' a strange thing happened, which turned my shame into surprise and triumph.

Through the mist which had gathered before my eyes I saw a boy coming out of the boys' class at the end of the long room. It was Martin Conrad, and I remember that he rolled as he walked like old Tommy the gardener. Everybody saw him, and the schoolmistress said in her sharp voice:

"Martin Conrad, what right have you to leave your place without permission? Go back, sir, this very moment.''

Instead of going back Martin came on, and as he did so he dragged his big soft hat out of the belt of his Norfolk jacket and with both hands pulled it down hard on his head.

"Go back, sir!'' cried the schoolmistress, and I saw her step towards him with the cane poised and switching in the air, as if about to strike.

The boy said nothing, but just shaking himself like a big dog he dropped his head and butted at the schoolmistress as she approached him, struck her somewhere in the waist and sent her staggering and gasping against the wall.

Then, without a word, he took my hand, as something that belonged to him, and before the schoolmistress could recover her breath, or the scholars awake from their astonishment, he marched me, as if his little stocky figure had been sixteen feet tall, in stately silence out of the school.

NINTH CHAPTER

I WAS never sent back to school, and I heard that Martin, by order of the butcher, was publicly expelled. This was a cause of distress to our mothers, who thought the future of our lives had been permanently darkened, but I cannot say that it ever stood between us and our sunshine. On the contrary it occurred that—Aunt Bridget having washed her hands of me, and Martin's father being unable to make up his mind what to do with him—we found ourselves for some time at large and were nothing loth to take advantage of our liberty, until a day came which brought a great disaster.

One morning I found Martin with old Tommy the Mate in his potting-shed, deep in the discussion of their usual subject—the perils and pains of Arctic exploration, when you have little food in your wallet and not too much in your stomach.

"But you has lots of things when you gets there—hams and flitches and oranges and things—hasn't you?" said Martin.

"Never a ha'p'orth," said Tommy. "Nothing but glory. You just takes your Alping stock and your sleeping sack and your bit o' biscuit and away you go over crevaxes deeper nor Martha's gullet and mountains higher nor Mount Blank and never think o' nothing but doing something that nobody's never done before. My goodness, yes, boy, that's the way of it when you're out asploring. 'Glory's waiting for me' says you, and on you go."

At that great word I saw Martin's blue eyes glisten like the sea when the sun is shining on it; and then, seeing me for the first time, he turned back to old Tommy and said:

"I s'pose you lets women go with you when you're out asploring—women and girls?"

"Never a woman," said Tommy.

"Not never—not if they're stunners?" said Martin.

"Well," says Tommy, glancing down at me, while his starboard eye twinkled, "I won't say never—not if they're stunners."

Next day Martin, attended by William Rufus, arrived at our house with a big corn sack on his shoulder, a long broom-handle in his hand, a lemonade bottle half filled with milk, a large sea biscuit and a small Union Jack which came from the confectioner's on the occasion of his last birthday.

"Glory's waiting for me—come along, shipmate," he said in a mysterious whisper, and without a word of inquiry, I obeyed.

He gave me the biscuit and I put it in the pocket of my frock, and the bottle of milk, and I tied it to my belt, and then off we went, with the dog bounding before us.

I knew he was going to the sea, and my heart was in my mouth, for of all the things I was afraid of I feared the sea most—a terror born with me, perhaps, on the fearful night of my birth. But I had to live up to the character I had given myself when Martin became my brother, and the one dread of my life was that, finding me as timid as other girls, he might want me no more.

We reached the sea by a little bay, called Murphy's Mouth, which had a mud cabin that stood back to the cliff and a small boat that was moored to a post on the shore. Both belonged to Tommy the Mate, who was a "widow man" living alone, and therefore there were none to see us when we launched the boat and set out on our voyage. It was then two o'clock in the afternoon, the sun was shining, and the tide, which was at the turn, was beginning to flow.

I had never been in a boat before, but I dared not say anything about that, and after Martin had fixed the bow oar for me and taken the stroke himself, I spluttered and plunged and made many blunders. I had never been on the sea either, and almost as soon as we shot clear of the shore and were lifted on to the big waves, I began to feel dizzy, and dropped my oar, with the result that it slipped through the rollocks and was washed away. Martin saw what had happened as we swung round to his rowing, but when I expected him to scold me, he only said:

"Never mind, shipmate! I was just thinking we would do better with one," and, shipping his own oar in the stern of the boat, he began to scull.

My throat was hurting me, and partly from shame and partly from fear, I now sat forward, with William Rufus on my lap, and said as little as possible. But Martin was in high spirits, and while his stout little body rolled to the rocking of the boat he whistled and sang and shouted messages to me over his shoulder.

"My gracious! Isn't this what you call ripping?" he cried, and though my teeth were chattering, I answered that it was.

"Some girls—Jimmy Christopher's sister and Nessy MacLeod and Betsy Beauty—would be frightened to come asploring, wouldn't they?"

"Wouldn't they?" I said, and I laughed, though I was trembling down to the soles of my shoes.

We must have been half an hour out, and the shore seemed so far away that Murphy's Mouth and Tommy's cabin and even the trees of the Big House looked like something I had seen through the wrong end of a telescope, when he turned his head, with a wild light in his eyes, and said:

"See the North Pole out yonder?"

"Don't I?" I answered, though I was such a practical little person, and had not an ounce of "dream" in me.

I knew quite well where he was going to. He was going to St. Mary's Rock, and of all the places on land or sea, it was the place I was most afraid of, being so big and frowning, an ugly black mass, standing twenty to thirty feet out of the water, draped like a coffin in a pall, with long fronds of seaweed, and covered, save at high water, by a multitude of hungry sea-fowl.

A white cloud of the birds rose from their sleep as we approached, and wheeled and whistled and screamed and beat their wings over our heads. I wanted to scream too, but Martin said:

"My gracious, isn't this splendiferous?"

"Isn't it?" I answered, and, little hypocrite that I was, I began to sing.

I remember that I sang one of Tommy's sailor-songs, "Sally," because its jolly doggerel was set to such a jaunty tune—

"Oh Sally's the gel for me,
Our Sally's the gel for me,
I'll marry the gel that I love best
When I come back from sea."

My pretence of happiness was shortlived, for at the next moment I made another mistake. Drawing up his boat to a ledge of the rock, and laying hold of our painter, Martin leapt ashore, and then held out his hand to me to follow him, but in fear of a big wave I held back when I ought to have jumped, and he was drenched from head to foot. I was ashamed, and thought he would have scolded me, but he only shook himself and said:

"That's nothing! We don't mind a bit of wet when we're out asploring."

My throat was hurting me again and I could not speak, but without waiting for me to answer he coiled the rope about my right arm, and told me to stay where I was, and hold fast to the boat, while he climbed the rock and took possession of it in the name of the king.

"Do or die we allus does that when we're out asploring," he said, and with his sack over his shoulder, his broom-handle in his hand and his little Union Jack sticking out of the hole in the crown of his hat, he clambered up the crag and disappeared over the top of it.

Being left alone, for the dog had followed him, my nervousness increased tenfold, and thinking at last that the rising tide was about to submerge the ledge on which I stood, I tried in my fright to climb the cliff. But hardly had I taken three steps when my foot slipped and I clutched the seaweed to save myself from falling, with the result that the boat's rope slid from my arm, and went rip-rip-ripping down the rock until it fell with a splash into the sea.

I saw what I had done, and I screamed, and then Martin's head appeared after a moment on the ledge above me. But it was too late for him to do anything, for the boat had already drifted six yards away, and just when I thought he would have shrieked at me for cutting off our only connection with the shore, he said:

"Never mind, shipmate! We allus expecs to lose a boat or two when we're out asploring."

I was silent from shame, but Martin, having hauled me up the rock by help of the broom handle, rattled away as if nothing had happened—pointing proudly to a rust-eaten triangle with a bell suspended inside of it and his little flag floating on top.

"But, oh dear, what are we to do now?" I whimpered.

"Don't you worrit about that," he said. "We'll just signal back to the next base—we call them bases when we're out asploring."

I understood from this that he was going to ring the bell which, being heard on the land, would bring somebody to our relief. But the bell was big, only meant to be put in motion on stormy nights by the shock and surging of an angry sea, and when Martin had tied a string to its tongue it was a feeble sound he struck from it.

Half an hour passed, an hour, two hours, and still I saw nothing on the water but our own empty boat rocking its way back to the shore.

"Will they ever come?" I faltered.

"Ra—ther! Just you wait and you'll see them coming. And when they take us ashore there'll be crowds and crowds with bugles and bands and things to take us home. My goodness, yes," he said, with the same wild look, "hundreds and tons of them!"

But the sun set over the sea behind us, the land in front grew dim, the moaning tide rose around the quaking rock and even the screaming sea-fowl deserted us, and still there was no sign of relief. My heart was quivering through my clothes by this time, but Martin, who had whistled and sung, began to talk about being hungry.

"My goodness yes, I'm that hungry I could eat. . . . I could eat a dog—we allus eats our dogs when we're out asploring."

This reminded me of the biscuit, but putting my hand to the pocket of my frock I found to my dismay that it was gone, having fallen out, perhaps, when I slipped in my climbing. My lip fell and I looked up at him with eyes of fear, but he only said:

"No matter! We never minds a bit of hungry when we're out asploring."

I did not know then, what now I know, that my little boy who could not learn his lessons and had always been in disgrace, was a born gentleman, but my throat was thick and my eyes were swimming and to hide my emotion I pretended to be ill.

"I know," said Martin. "Dizzingtory! [dysentery]. We allus has dizzingtory when we're out asploring."

There was one infallible cure for that, though—milk!

"I allus drinks a drink of milk, and away goes the dizzingtory in a jiffy."

This recalled the bottle, but when I twisted it round on my belt, hoping to make amends for the lost biscuit, I found to my confusion that it had suffered from the same misadventure, being cracked in the bottom, and every drop of the contents gone.

That was the last straw, and the tears leapt to my eyes, but Martin went on whistling and singing and ringing the big bell as if nothing had happened.

The darkness deepened, the breath of night came sweeping over the sea, the boom of the billows on the rock became still more terrible, and I began to shiver.

"The sack!" cried Martin. "We allus sleeps in sacks when we're out asploring."

I let him do what he liked with me now, but when he had packed me up in the sack, and put me to lie at the foot of the triangle, telling me I was as right as ninepence, I began to think of something I had read in a storybook, and half choking with sobs I said:

"Martin!"

"What now, shipmate?"

"It's all my fault . . . and I'm just as frightened as Jimmy Christopher's sister and Nessy MacLeod and Betsy Beauty . . . and I'm not a stunner . . . and you'll have to give me up . . . and leave me here and save yourself and . . ."

But Martin stopped me with a shout and a crack of laughter.

"Not *me!* Not much! We never leaves a pal when we're out asploring. Long as we lives we never does it. Not never!"

That finished me. I blubbered like a baby, and William Rufus, who was sitting by my side, lifted his nose and joined in my howling.

What happened next I never rightly knew. I was only aware, though my back was to him, that Martin, impatient of his string, had leapt up to the bell and was swinging his little body from the tongue to make a louder clamour. One loud clang I heard, and then came a crash and a crack, and then silence.

"What is it?" I cried, but at first there was no answer.

"Have you hurt yourself?"

And then through the thunderous boom of the rising sea on the rock, came the breaking voice of my boy (he had broken his right arm) mingled with the sobs which his unconquered and unconquerable little soul was struggling to suppress—

"We never minds a bit of hurt . . . we never minds *nothing* when we're out asploring!"

Meantime on shore there was a great commotion. My father was railing at Aunt Bridget, who was upbraiding my mother, who was crying for Father Dan, who was flying off for Doctor Conrad, who was putting his horse into his gig and scouring the parish in search of the two lost children.

But Tommy the Mate, who remembered the conversation in the potting-shed and thought he heard the tinkle of a bell at sea, hurried off to the shore, where he found his boat bobbing on the beach, and thereby came to his own conclusions.

By the light of a lantern he pulled out to St. Mary's Rock, and there, guided by the howling of the dog, he came upon the great little explorers, hardly more than three feet above high water, lying together in the corn sack, locked in each other's arms and fast asleep.

There were no crowds and bands of music waiting for us when Tommy brought us ashore, and after leaving Martin with his broken limb in his mother's arms at the gate of Sunny Lodge, he took me over to the Presbytery in order that Father Dan might carry me home and so stand between me and my father's wrath and Aunt Bridget's birch.

Unhappily there was no need for this precaution. The Big House, when we reached it, was in great confusion. My mother had broken a blood vessel.

TENTH CHAPTER

During the fortnight in which my mother was confined to bed I was her constant companion and attendant. With the mighty eagerness of a child who knew nothing of what the solemn time foreboded I flew about the house on tiptoe, fetching my mother's medicine and her milk and the ice to cool it, and always praising myself for my industry and thinking I was quite indispensable.

"You couldn't do without your little Mally, could you, mammy?" I would say, and my mother would smooth my hair lovingly with her thin white hand and answer:

"No, indeed, I couldn't do without my little Mally." And then my little bird-like beak would rise proudly in the air.

All this time I saw nothing of Martin, and only heard through Doctor Conrad in his conversations with my mother, that the boy's broken arm had been set, and that as soon as it was better, he was to be sent to King George's College, which was at the other end of Ellan. What was to be done with myself I never inquired, being so satisfied that my mother could not get on without me.

I was partly aware that big letters, bearing foreign postage-stamps and seals and coats of arms, with pictures of crosses and hearts, were coming to our house. I was also aware that at intervals, while my mother was in bed, there was the sound of voices, as if in eager and sometimes heated conference, in the room below, and that my mother would raise her pale face from her pillow and stop my chattering with "Hush!" when my father's voice was louder and sterner than usual. But it never occurred to me to connect these incidents with myself, until the afternoon of the day on which my mother got up for the first time.

She was sitting before the fire, for autumn was stealing on, and I was bustling about her, fixing the rug about her knees and telling her if she wanted anything she was to be sure and call her little Mally, when a timid knock came to the door and Father Dan entered the room. I can see his fair head and short figure still, and hear his soft Irish voice, as he stepped forward and said:

"Now don't worry, my daughter. Above all, don't worry."

By long experience my mother knew this for a sign of the dear Father's own perturbation, and I saw her lower lip tremble as she asked:

"Hadn't Mary better run down to the garden?"

"No! Oh no!" said Father Dan. "It is about Mary I come to speak, so our little pet may as well remain."

Then at a signal from my mother I went over to her and stood by her side, and she embraced my waist with a trembling arm, while the Father took a seat by her side, and, fumbling the little silver cross on his chain, delivered his message.

After long and anxious thought—and he might say prayer—it had been decided that I should be sent away to a Convent. It was to be a Convent of the Sacred Heart in Rome. He was to take me to Rome himself and see me safely settled there. And they (meaning my father and Aunt Bridget) had promised him—faithfully promised him—that when the holidays came round he should be sent to bring me home again. So there was nothing to fear, nothing to worry about, nothing to . . . to . . .

My mother listened as long as she could, and then—her beautiful white face distorted by pain—she broke in on the Father's message with a cry of protest.

"But she is so young! Such a child! Only seven years old! How can any one think of sending such a little one away from home?"

Father Dan tried to pacify her. It was true I was very young, but then the Reverend Mother was such a good woman. She would love me and care for me as if I were her own child. And then the good nuns, God bless their holy souls . . .

"But Mary is all I have," cried my mother, "and if they take her away from me I shall be broken-hearted. At such a time too! How cruel they are! They know quite well what the doctor says. Can't they wait a little longer?"

I could see that Father Dan was arguing against himself, for his eyes filled as he said:

"It's hard, I know it's hard for you, my daughter. But perhaps it's best for the child that she should go away from home—perhaps it's all God's blessed and holy will. Remember there's a certain person here who isn't kind to our little innocent, and is making her a cause of trouble. Not that I think she is actuated by evil intentions . . ."

"But she is, she is," cried my mother, who was growing more and more excited.

"Then all the more reason why Mary should go to the Convent—for a time at all events."

My mother began to waver, and she said:

"Let her be sent to a Convent in the island then."

"I thought of that, but there isn't one," said Father Dan.

"Then . . . then . . . then take her to the Presbytery," said my mother. "Dear, dear Father," she pleaded, "let her live with you, and have somebody to teach her, and then she can come to see me every day, or twice a week, or even once a week—I am not unreasonable."

"It would be beautiful," said Father Dan, reaching over to touch my arm. "To have our little Mary in my dull old house would be like having the sun there always. But there are reasons why a young girl should not be brought up in the home of a priest, so it is better that our little precious should go to Rome."

My mother was breaking down and Father Dan followed up his advantage.

"Then wisha, my daughter, think what a good thing it will be for the child. She will be one of the children of the Infant Jesus first, then a child of Mary, and then of the Sacred Heart itself. And then remember, Rome! The holy city! The city of the Holy Father! Why, who knows, she may even see himself some day!"

"Yes, yes, I know," said my mother, and then turning with her melting eyes to me she said:

"Would my Mary like to go—leaving her mamma but coming home in the holidays—would she?"

I was going to say I would not, because mamma could not possibly get on without me, but before I could reply Aunt Bridget, with her bunch of keys at her waist, came jingling into the room, and catching my mother's last words, said, in her harsh, high-pitched voice.

"Isabel! You astonish me! To defer to the will of a child! Such a child too! So stubborn and spoiled and self-willed! If *we* say it is good for her to go she *must* go!"

I could feel through my mother's arm, which was still about my waist, that she was trembling from head to foot, but at first she did not speak and Aunt Bridget, in her peremptory way, went on:

"We say it is good for you, too, Isabel, if she is not to hasten your death by preying on your nerves and causing you to break more blood vessels. So we are consulting your welfare as well as the girl's in sending her away."

My mother's timid soul could bear no more. I think it must have been the only moment of anger her gentle spirit ever knew, but, gathering all her strength, she turned upon Aunt Bridget in ungovernable excitement.

"Bridget," she said, "you are doing nothing of the kind. You know you are not. You are only trying to separate me from my child and my child from me. When you came to my house I thought you would be kinder to my child than anybody else, but you have not been, you have been cruel to her, and shut your heart against her, and while I have been helpless here, and in bed, you have never shown her one moment of love and kindness. No, you have no feeling except for your own, and it never occurs to you that having brought your own child into my house you are trying to turn my child out of it.''

''So that's how you look at it, is it?'' said Aunt Bridget, with a flash of her cold grey eyes. ''I thought I came to this house—your house as you call it—only out of the best intentions, just to spare you trouble when you were ill and unable to attend to your duties as a wife. But because I correct your child when she is wilful and sly and wicked. . . .''

''Correct your own child, Bridget O'Neill!'' cried my mother, ''and leave mine to me. She's all I have and it isn't long I shall have her. You know quite well how much she has cost me, and that I haven't had a very happy married life, but instead of helping me with her father . . .''

''Say no more,'' said Aunt Bridget, ''we don't want you to hurt yourself again, and to allow this ill-conditioned child to be the cause of another hemorrhage.''

''Bridget O'Neill,'' cried my mother, rising up from her chair, ''you are a hard-hearted woman with a bad disposition. You know as well as I do that it wasn't Mary who made me ill, but you—you, who reproached me and taunted me about my child until my heart itself had to bleed. For seven years you have been doing that, and now you are disposing of my darling over my head without consulting me. Has a mother no rights in her own child—the child she has suffered for, and loved and lived for—that other people who care nothing for it should take it away from her and send it into a foreign country where she may never see it again? But you shall not do that! No, you shall not! As long as there's breath in my body you shall not do it, and if you attempt . . .''

In her wild excitement my mother had lifted one of her trembling hands into Aunt Bridget's face while the other was still clasped about me, when suddenly, with a look of fear on her face, she stopped speaking. She had heard a heavy step on the stairs. It was my father. He entered the room with his knotty forehead more compressed than usual and said:

''What's this she shall not do?''

My mother dropped back into her seat in silence, and Aunt Bridget, wiping her eyes on her black apron—she only wept when my father was present—proceeded to explain.

''It seems I am a hard-hearted woman with a bad disposition and though I've been up early and late and made myself a servant for seven years I'm only in this house to turn my sister's child out of it. It seems too, that we have no business—none of us have—to say what ought to be done for this girl—her mother being the only person who has any rights in the child, and if we attempt . . ."

"What's that?"

In his anger and impatience my father could listen no longer and in his loud voice he said:

"Since when has a father lost control of his own daughter? He has to provide for her, hasn't he? If she wants anything it's to him she has to look for it, isn't it? That's the law I guess, eh? Always has been, all the world over. Then what's all this hustling about?"

My mother made a feeble effort to answer him.

"I was only saying, Daniel . . ."

"You were saying something foolish and stupid. I reckon a man can do what he likes with his own, can't he? If this girl is my child and I say she is to go somewhere, she is to go." And saying this my father brought down his thick hand with a thump on to a table.

It was the first time he had laid claim to me, and perhaps that acted on my mother, as she said, submissively:

"Very well, dear. *You* know best what is best for Mary, and if you say—you and Bridget and . . . and Father Dan . . ."

"I do say, and that's enough. So just go to work and fix up this Convent scheme without future notice. And hark here, let me see for the future if a man can't have peace from these two-cent trifles for his important business."

My mother was crushed. Her lips moved again, but she said nothing aloud, and my father turned on his heel, and left the room, shaking the floor at every step under the weight of his sixteen stone. At the next moment, Aunt Bridget, jingling her keys, went tripping after him.

Hardly had they gone when my mother broke into a long fit of coughing, and when it was over she lay back exhausted, with her white face and her tired eyes turned upwards. Then I clasped her about the neck, and Father Dan, whose cheeks were wet with tears patted her drooping hand.

My darling mother! Never once have I thought of her without the greatest affection, but now that I know for myself what she must have suffered I love best to think of her as she was that day—my sweet, beautiful, timid angel—standing up for one brief moment, not only against Aunt Bridget, but against the cruelty of all the ages, in the divine right of her outraged motherhood.

ELEVENTH CHAPTER

My mother's submission was complete. Within twenty-four hours she was busy preparing clothes for my journey to Rome. The old coloured pattern book was brought out again, material was sent for, a sewing-maid was engaged from the village, and above all, in my view, an order was dispatched to Blackwater for a small squirrel-skin scarf, a large squirrel-skin muff, and a close-fitting squirrel-skin hat with a feather on the side of it.

A child's heart is a running brook, and it would wrong the truth to say that I grieved much in the midst of these busy preparations. On the contrary I felt a sort of pride in them, poor innocent that I was, as in something that gave me a certain high superiority over Betsy Beauty and Nessy MacLeod, and entitled me to treat them with condescension.

Father Dan, who came more frequently than ever, fostered this feeling without intending to do so, by telling me, whenever we were alone, that I must be a good girl to everybody now, and especially to my mother.

"My little woman would be sorry to worry mamma, wouldn't she?" he would whisper, and when I answered that I would be sorrier than sorry, he would say:

"Wisha then, she must be brave. She must keep up. She must not grieve about going away or cry when the time comes for parting."

I said "yes" and "yes" to all this, feeling very confidential and courageous, but I dare say the good Father gave the same counsel to my mother also, for she and I had many games of make-believe, I remember, in which we laughed and chattered and sang, though I do not think I ever suspected that the part we played was easier to me than to her.

It dawned on me at last, though, when in the middle of the night, near to the time of my going away, I was awakened by a bad fit of my mother's coughing, and heard her say to herself in the deep breathing that followed:

"My poor child! What is to become of her?"

Nevertheless all went well down to the day of my departure. It had been arranged that I was to sail to Liverpool by the first of the two daily steamers, and without any awakening I leapt out of bed at the first sign of daylight. So great was my delight that I began to dance in my nightdress to an invisible skipping rope, forgetting my father, who always rose at dawn and was at breakfast in the room below.

My mother and I breakfasted in bed, and then there was great commotion. It chiefly consisted for me in putting on my new clothes, including my furs, and then turning round and round on tiptoe and smiling at myself in a mirror. I was doing this while my mother was telling me to write to her as often as I was allowed, and while she knelt at her prayer-stool, which she used as a desk, to make a copy of the address for my letters.

Then I noticed that the first line of her superscription "Mrs. Daniel O'Neill" was blurred by the tears that were dropping from her eyes, and my throat began to hurt me dreadfully. But I remembered what Father Dan had told me to do, so I said:

"Never mind, mammy. Don't worry—I'll be home for the holidays."

Soon afterwards we heard the carriage wheels passing under the window, and then Father Dan came up in a white knitted muffler, and with a funny bag which he used for his surplice at funerals, and said, through a little cloud of white breath, that everything was ready.

I saw that my mother was turning round and taking out her pocket-handkerchief, and I was snuffling a little myself, but at a sign from Father Dan, who was standing at the threshold, I squeezed back the water in my eyes and cried:

"Good-bye mammy. I'll be back for Christmas," and then darted across to the door.

I was just passing through it when I heard my mother say "Mary" in a strange low voice, and I turned and saw her—I can see her still—with her beautiful pale face all broken up, and her arms held out to me.

Then I rushed back to her, and she clasped me to her breast, crying, "Mally veen! My Mally veen!" and I could feel her heart beating through her dress and hear the husky rattle in her throat, and then all our poor little game of make-believe broke down utterly.

At the next moment my father was calling upstairs that I should be late for the steamer, so my mother dried her own eyes and then mine, and let me go.

Father Dan was gone when I reached the head of the stairs, but seeing Nessy MacLeod and Betsy Beauty at the bottom of them I soon recovered my composure, and sailing down in my finery I passed them in stately silence with my little bird-like head in the air.

I intended to do the same with Aunt Bridget, who was standing with a shawl over her shoulders by the open door, but she touched me and said:

"Aren't you going to kiss me good-bye, then?"

"No," I answered, drawing my little body to its utmost height.

"And why not?"

"Because you've been unkind to mamma and cruel to me, and because you think there's nobody but Betsy Beauty. And I'll tell them at the Convent that you are making mamma ill, and you're as bad as . . . as bad as the bad women in the Bible!"

"My gracious!" said Aunt Bridget, and she tried to laugh, but I could see that her face became as white as a white-washed wall. This did not trouble me in the least until I reached the carriage, when Father Dan, who was sitting inside, said:

"My little Mary won't leave home like that—without kissing her aunt and saying good-bye to her cousins."

So I returned and shook hands with Nessy MacLeod and Betsy Beauty, and lifted my little face to my Aunt Bridget.

"That's better," she said, after she had kissed me, but when I had passed her my quick little ear caught the words:

"Good thing she's going, though."

During this time my father, with the morning mist playing like hoar-frost about his iron-grey hair, had been tramping the gravel and saying the horses were getting cold, so without more ado he bundled me into the carriage and banged the door on me.

But hardly had we started when Father Dan, who was blinking his little eyes and pretending to blow his nose on his coloured print handkerchief, said, "Look!" and pointed up to my mother's room.

There she was again, waving and kissing her hand to me through her open window, and she continued to do so until we swirled round some trees and I lost the sight of her.

What happened in my mother's room when her window was closed I do not know, but I well remember that, creeping into a corner of the carriage, I forgot all about the glory and grandeur of going away, and that it did not help me to remember when half way down the drive a boy with a dog darted from under the chestnuts and raced alongside of us.

It was Martin, and though his right arm was in a sling, he leapt up to the step and held on to the open window by his left hand while he pushed his head into the carriage and made signs to me to take out of his mouth a big red apple which he held in his teeth by the stalk. I took it, and then he dropped to the ground, without uttering a word, and I could laugh now to think of the gruesome expression of his face with its lagging lower lip and bloodshot eyes. I had no temptation to do so then, however, and least of all when I looked back and saw his little one-armed figure in the big mushroom hat, standing on the top of the high wall of the bridge, with William Rufus beside him.

We reached Blackwater in good time for the boat, and when the funnels had ceased trumpeting and we were well away, I saw that we were sitting in one of two private cabins on the upper deck; and then Father Dan told me that the other was occupied by the young Lord Raa, and his guardian, and that they were going up together for the first time to Oxford.

I am sure this did not interest me in the least at that moment, so false is it that fate forewarns us when momentous events are about to occur. And now that I had time to think, a dreadful truth was beginning to dawn on me, so that when Father Dan, who was much excited, went off to pay his respects to the great people, I crudled up in the corner of the cabin that was nearest to the door and told myself that after all I had been turned out of my father's house, and would never see my mother and Martin any more.

I was sitting so, with my hands in my big muff and my face to the stern, making the tiniest occasional sniff as the mountains of my home faded away in the sunlight, which was now tipping the hilltops with a feathery crest, when my cabin was darkened by somebody who stood in the doorway.

It was a tall boy, almost a man, and I knew in a moment who he was. He was the young Lord Raa. And at first I thought how handsome and well dressed he was as he looked down at me and smiled. After a moment he stepped into the cabin and sat in front of me and said:

"So you are little Mary O'Neill, are you?"

I did not speak. I was thinking he was not so very handsome after all, having two big front teeth like Betsy Beauty.

"The girl who ought to have been a boy and put my nose out, eh?"

Still I did not speak. I was thinking his voice was like Nessy MacLeod's—shrill and harsh and grating.

"Poor little mite! Going all the way to Rome to a Convent, isn't she?"

Even yet I did not speak. I was thinking his eyes were like Aunt Bridget's—cold and grey and piercing.

"So silent and demure, though! Quite a little nun already! A deuced pretty one, too, if anybody asks me."

I was beginning to have a great contempt for him.

"Where did you get those big angel eyes from? Stole them from some picture of the Madonna, I'll swear."

By this time I had concluded that he was not worth speaking to, so I turned my head and I was looking back at the sea, when I heard him say:

"I suppose you are going to give me a kiss, you nice little woman, aren't you?"

"No."

"Oh, but you must—we are relations, you know."

"I won't."

He laughed at that, and rising from his seat, he reached over to kiss me, whereupon I drew one of my hands out of my muff and doubling my little mittened fist, I struck him in the face.

Being, as I afterwards learned, a young autocrat, much indulged by servants and generally tyrannising over them, he was surprised and angry.

"The spitfire!" he said. "Who would have believed it? The face of a nun and the temper of a devil! But you'll have to make amends for this, my lady."

With that he went away and I saw no more of him until the steamer was drawing up at the landing stage at Liverpool, and then, while the passengers were gathering up their luggage, he came back with Father Dan, and the tall sallow man who was his guardian, and said:

"Going to give me that kiss to make amends, or are you to owe me a grudge for the rest of your life, my lady?"

"My little Mary couldn't owe a grudge to anybody," said Father Dan. "She'll kiss his lordship and make amends; I'm certain."

And then I did to the young Lord Raa what I had done to Aunt Bridget—I held up my face and he kissed me.

It was a little, simple, trivial incident, but it led with other things to the most lamentable fact of my life, and when I think of it I sometimes wonder how it comes to pass that He who numbers the flowers of the field and counts the sparrows as they fall has no handwriting with which to warn His children that their footsteps may not fail.

TWELFTH CHAPTER

Of our journey to Rome nothing remains to me but the memory of sleeping in different beds in different towns, of trains screaming through tunnels and slowing down in glass-roofed railway stations, of endless crowds of people moving here and there in a sort of maze, nothing but this, and the sense of being very little and very helpless and of having to be careful not to lose sight of Father Dan, for fear of being lost—until the afternoon of the fourth day after we left home.

We were then crossing a wide rolling plain that was almost destitute of trees, and looked, from the moving train, like green billows of the sea with grass growing over them. Father Dan was reading his breviary for the following day, not knowing what he would have to do in it, when the sun set in a great blaze of red beyond the horizon, and then suddenly a big round black ball, like a captive balloon, seemed to rise in the midst of the glory.

I called Father Dan's attention to this, and in a moment he was fearfully excited.

''Don't worry, my child,'' he cried, while tears of joy sprang to his eyes. ''Do you know what that is? That's the dome of St. Peter's! Rome, my child, Rome!''

It was nine o'clock when we arrived at our destination, and in the midst of a great confusion I walked by Father Dan's side and held on to his vertical pocket, while he carried his own bag, and a basket of mine, down the crowded platform to an open cab outside the station.

Then Father Dan wiped his forehead with his print handkerchief and I sat close up to him, and the driver cracked his long whip and shouted at the pedestrians while we rattled on and on over stony streets, which seemed to be full of statues and fountains that were lit up by a great white light that was not moonlight and yet looked like it.

But at last we stopped at a little door of a big house which seemed to stand, with a church beside it, on a high shelf overlooking the city, for I could see many domes like that of St. Peter lying below us.

A grill in the little door was first opened and then a lady in a black habit, with a black band round her forehead and white bands down each side of her face, opened the door itself, and asked us to step in, and when we had done so, she took us down a long passage into a warm room, where another lady, dressed in the same way, only a little grander, sat in a big red arm-chair.

Father Dan, who was still wearing his knitted muffler, bowed very low to this lady, calling her the Reverend Mother Magdalene, and she answered him in English but with a funny sound which I afterwards knew to be a foreign accent.

I remember that I thought she was very beautiful, nearly as beautiful as my mother, and when Father Dan told me to kiss her hand I did so, and then she put me to sit in a chair and looked at me.

"What is her age?" she asked, whereupon Father Dan said he thought I would be eight that month, which was right, being October.

"Small, isn't she?" said the lady, and then Father Dan said something about poor mamma which I cannot remember.

After that they talked about other things, and I looked at the pictures on the walls—pictures of Saints and Popes and, above all, a picture of Jesus with His heart open in His bosom.

"The child will be hungry," said the lady. "She must have something to eat before she goes to bed—the other children have gone already."

Then she rang a hand-bell, and when the first lady came back she said:

"Ask Sister Angela to come to me immediately."

A few minutes later Sister Angela came into the room, and she was quite young, almost a girl, with such a sweet sad face that I loved her instantly.

"This is little Mary O'Neill. Take her to the Refectory and give her whatever she wants, and don't leave her until she is quiet and comfortable."

"Very well, Mother," said Sister Angela, and taking my hand she whispered: "Come, Mary, you look tired."

I rose to go with her, but at the same moment Father Dan rose too, and I heard him say he must lose no time in finding an hotel, for his Bishop had given him only one day to remain in Rome, and he had to catch an early train home the following morning.

This fell on me like a thunderbolt. I hardly know what I had led myself to expect, but certainly the idea of being left alone in Rome had never once occurred to me.

My little heart was fluttering, and dropping the Sister's hand I stepped back and took Father Dan's and said:

"You are not going to leave your little Mary are you, Father?"

It was harder for the dear Father than for me, for I remember that, fearfully flurried, he stammered in a thick voice something about the Reverend Mother taking good care of me, and how he was sure to come back at Christmas, according to my father's faithful promise, to take me home for the holidays.

After that Sister Angela led me, sniffing a little still, to the Refectory, which was a large, echoing room, with rows of plain deal tables and forms, ranged in front of a reading desk that had another and much larger picture of the Sacred Heart on the wall above it. Only one gasjet was burning, and I sat under it to eat my supper, and after I had taken a basin of soup I felt more comforted.

Then Sister Angela lit a lamp and taking my hand she led me up a stone staircase to the Dormitory, which was a similar room, but not so silent, because it was full of beds, and the breathing of the girls, who were all asleep, made it sound like the watchmaker's shop in our village, only more church-like and solemn.

My bed was near to the door, and after Sister Angela had helped me to undress, and tucked me in, she made her voice very low, and said I would be quite comfortable now, and she was sure I was going to be a good little girl and a dear child of the Infant Jesus; and then I could not help taking my arms out again and clasping her round the neck and drawing her head down and kissing her.

After that she took the lamp and went away to a cubicle which was partitioned off the end of the Dormitory and there I could see her prepare to go to bed herself—taking the white bands off her cheeks and the black band off her forehead, and letting her long light hair fall in beautiful wavy masses about her face, which made her look so sweet and home like.

But oh, I was so lonely! Never in my life since—no, not even when I was in my lowest depths—have I felt so little and helpless and alone. After the Sister had gone to bed and everything was quiet in the Dormitory save for the breathing of the girls—all strangers to me and I to them—from mere loneliness I covered up my head in the clothes just as I used to do when I was a little thing and my father came into my mother's room.

I try not to think bitterly of my father, but even yet I am at a loss to know how he could have cast me away so lightly. Was it merely that he wanted peace for his business and saw no chance of securing it in his own home except by removing the chief cause of Aunt Bridget's jealousy? Or was it that his old grudge against Fate for making me a girl made him wish to rid himself of the sight of me?

I do not know. I cannot say. But in either case I try in vain to see how he could have thought he had a right, caring nothing for me, to tear me from the mother who loved me and had paid for me so dear; or how he could have believed that because he was my father, charged with the care of my poor little body, he had control over the little bleeding heart which was not his to make to suffer.

He is my father—God help me to think the best of him.

THIRTEENTH CHAPTER

At half past six in the morning I was awakened by the loud ringing of the getting-up bell, and as soon as I could rouse myself from the deep sleep of childhood I saw that a middle-aged nun with a severe face was saying a prayer, and that all the girls in the dormitory were kneeling in their beds while they made the responses.

A few minutes later, when the girls were chattering and laughing as they dressed, making the room tingle with twittering sounds like a tree full of linnets in the spring, a big girl came up to me and said:

"I am Mildred Bankes and Sister Angela says I am to look after you to-day."

She was about fifteen years of age, and had a long plain-featured face which reminded me of one of my father's horses that was badly used by the farm boys; but there was something sweet in her smile that made me like her instantly.

She helped me to dress in my brown velvet frock, but said that one of her first duties would be to take me to the lay sisters who made the black habits which all the girls in the convent wore.

It was still so early that the darkness of the room was just broken by pale shafts of light from the windows, but I could see that the children of my own age were only seven or eight altogether, while the majority of the girls were several years older, and Mildred explained this by telling me that the children of the Infant Jesus, like myself, were so few that they had been put into the dormitory of the children of the Sacred Heart.

In a quarter of an hour everybody was washed and dressed, and then, at a word from Sister Angela, the girls went leaping and laughing downstairs to the Meeting Room, which was a large hall, with a platform at the farther end of it and another picture of the Sacred Heart, pierced with sharp thorns, on the wall.

The Reverend Mother was there with the other nuns of the Convent, all pale-faced and slow eyed women wearing rosaries, and she said a long prayer, to which the scholars (there were seventy or eighty altogether) made responses, and then there was silence for five minutes, which were supposed to be devoted to meditation, although I could not help seeing that some of the big girls were whispering to each other while their heads were down.

After that, and Mass in the Church, we went scurrying away to the Refectory, which was now warm with the steam from our breakfast and bubbling with cheerful voices, making a noise that was like water boiling in a saucepan.

I was so absorbed by all I saw that I forgot to eat until Mildred nudged me to do so, and even when my spoon was half way to my mouth something happened which brought it down again.

At the tinkle of a hand-bell one of the big girls had stepped up to the reading-desk and begun to read from a book which I afterwards knew to be "The Imitation of Christ." She was about sixteen years of age, and her face was so vivid that I could not take my eyes off it.

Her complexion was fair and her hair was auburn, but her eyes were so dark and searching that when she raised her head, as she often did, they seemed to look through and through you.

"Who is she?" I whispered.

"Alma Lier," Mildred whispered back, and when breakfast was over, and we were trooping off to lessons, she told me something about her.

Alma was an American. Her father was very rich and his home was in New York. But her mother lived in Paris, though she was staying at an hotel in Rome at present, and sometimes she came in a carriage to take her daughter for a drive.

Alma was the cleverest girl in the school too, and sometimes at the end of terms, when parents and friends came to the Convent and one of the Cardinals distributed the prizes, she had so many books to take away that she could hardly carry them down from the platform.

I listened to this with admiring awe, thinking Alma the most wonderful and worshipful of all creatures, and when I remember it now, after all these years, and the bitter experiences which have come with them, I hardly know whether to laugh or cry at the thought that such was the impression she first made on me.

My class was with the youngest of the children, and Sister Angela was my teacher. She was so sweet to me that her encouragement was like a kiss and her reproof like a caress; but I could think of nothing but Alma, and at noon, when the bell rang for lunch and Mildred took me back to the Refectory, I wondered if the same girl would read again.

She did, but this time in a foreign language, French as Mildred whispered—from the letters of the Blessed Margaret Mary Alacoque—and my admiration for Alma went up tenfold. I wondered if it could possibly occur that I should ever come to know her.

There is no worship like that of a child, and life for me, which had seemed so cold and dark the day before, became warm and bright with a new splendour.

I was impatient of everything that took me away from the opportunity of meeting with Alma—the visit to the lay-sisters to be measured for my new black clothes, the three o'clock "rosary," when the nuns walked with their classes in the sunshine, and, above all, the voluntary visit to the Blessed

Sacrament in the Church of the Convent, which seemed to me large and gorgeous, though divided across the middle by an open bronze screen, called a Cancello—the inner half, as Mildred whispered, being for the inmates of the school, while the outer half was for the congregation which came on Sunday to Benediction.

But at four o'clock we had dinner, when Alma read again—this time in Italian—from the writings of Saint Francis of Sales—and then, to my infinite delight, came a long recreation, when all the girls scampered out into the Convent garden, which was still bright with afternoon sunshine and as merry with laughter and shouts as the seashore on a windy summer morning.

The garden was a large bare enclosure, bounded on two sides by the convent buildings and on the other two by a yellow wall and an avenue made by a line of stone pines with heads like open umbrellas, but it had no other foliage except an old tree which reminded me of Tommy the Mate, having gnarled and sprawling limbs, and standing like a weather-beaten old sailor, four-square in the middle.

A number of the girls were singing and dancing around this tree, and I felt so happy just then that I should have loved to join them, but I was consumed by a desire to come to close quarters with the object of my devotion, so I looked eagerly about me and asked Mildred if Alma was likely to be there.

"Sure to be," said Mildred, and hardly were the words out of her mouth when Alma herself came straight down in our direction, surrounded by a group of admiring girls, who were hanging on to her and laughing at everything she said.

My heart began to thump, and without knowing what I was doing I stopped dead short, while Mildred went on a pace or two ahead of me.

Then I noticed that Alma had stopped too, and that her great searching eyes were looking down at me. In my nervousness, I tried to smile, but Alma continued to stare, and at length, in the tone of one who had accidentally turned up something with her toe that was little and ridiculous, she said:

"Goodness, girls, what's this?"

Then she burst into a fit of laughter, in which the other girls joined, and looking me up and down they all laughed together.

I knew what they were laughing at—the clothes my mother had made for me and I had felt so proud of. That burnt me like iron, and I think my lip must have dropped, but Alma showed no mercy.

"Dare say the little doll thinks herself pretty, though," she said. And then she passed on, and the girls with her, and as they went off they looked back over their shoulders and laughed again.

Never since has any human creature—not even Alma herself—made me suffer more than I suffered at that moment. My throat felt tight, tears leapt to my eyes, disappointment, humiliation, and shame swept over me like a flood, and I stood squeezing my little handkerchief in my hand and feeling as if I could have died.

At the next moment Mildred stepped back to me, and putting her arm about my waist she said:

"Never mind, Mary. She's a heartless thing. Don't have anything to do with her."

But all the sunshine had gone out of the day for me now and I cried for hours. I was still crying, silently but bitterly, when, at eight o'clock, we were saying the night prayers, and I saw Alma, who was in the opposite benches, whispering to one of the girls who sat next to her and then looking straight across at me.

And at nine o'clock when we went to bed I was crying more than ever, so that after the good-night-bell had been rung and the lights had been put down, Sister Angela, not knowing the cause of my sorrow, stepped up to my bed before going down stairs for her own studies, and whispered:

"You mustn't fret for home, Mary. You will soon get used to it."

But hardly had I been left alone, with the dull pain I could find no ease for, when somebody touched me on the shoulder, and, looking up, I saw a girl in her nightdress standing beside me. It was Alma and she said:

"Say, little girl, is your name O'Neill?"

Trembling with nervousness I answered that it was.

"Do you belong to the O'Neills of Ellan?"

Still trembling I told her that I did.

"My!" she said in quite another tone, and then I saw that by some means I had begun to look different in her eyes.

After a moment she sat on the side of my bed and asked questions about my home—if it was not large and very old, with big stone staircases, and great open fireplaces, and broad terraces, and beautiful walks going down to the sea.

I was so filled with the joy of finding myself looking grand in Alma's eyes that I answered "yes" and "yes" without thinking too closely about her questions, and my tears were all brushed away when she said:

"I knew somebody who lived in your house once, and I'll tell her all about you."

She stayed a few moments longer, and when going off she whispered:

"Hope you don't feel badly about my laughing in the garden to-day. I didn't mean a thing. But if any of the girls laugh again just say you're Alma Lier's friend and she's going to take care of you."

I could hardly believe my ears. Some great new splendour had suddenly dawned upon me and I was very happy.

I did not know then that the house which Alma had been talking of was not my father's house, but Castle Raa. I did not know then that the person who had lived there was her mother, and that in her comely and reckless youth she had been something to the bad Lord Raa who had lashed my father and sworn at my grandmother.

I did not know anything that was dead and buried in the past, or shrouded and veiled in the future. I only knew that Alma had called herself my friend and promised to take care of me. So with a glad heart I went to sleep.

FOURTEENTH CHAPTER

Alma kept her word, though perhaps her method of protection was such as would have commended itself only to the heart of a child.

It consisted in calling me Margaret Mary after our patron saint of the Sacred Heart, in taking me round the garden during recreation as if I had been a pet poodle, and, above all, in making my bed the scene of the conversaziones which some of the girls held at night when they were supposed to be asleep.

The secrecy of these gatherings flattered me, and when the unclouded moon, in the depths of the deep blue Italian sky, looked in on my group of girls in their nightdresses, bunched together on my bed, with my own little body between, I had a feeling of dignity as well as solemnity and awe.

Of course Alma was the chief spokeswoman at these whispered conferences. Sometimes she told us of her drives into the Borghese Gardens, where she saw the King and Queen, or to the Hunt on the Campagna, where she met the flower of the aristocracy, or to the Pincio, where the Municipal band played in the pavilion, while ladies sat in their carriages in the sunshine, and officers in blue cloaks saluted them and smiled.

Sometimes she indicated her intentions for the future, which was certainly not to be devoted to retreats and novenas, or to witness another black dress as long as she lived, and if she married (which was uncertain) it was not to be to an American, but to a Frenchman, because Frenchmen had ''family'' and ''blood,'' or perhaps to an Englishman, if he was a member of the House of Lords, in which case she would attend all the race-meetings and Coronations, and take tea at the Carlton, where she would eat *méringues glacés* every day and have as many *éclairs* as she liked.

And sometimes she would tell us the stories of the novels which she bribed one of the washing-women to smuggle into the convent—stories of ladies and their lovers, and of intoxicating dreams of kissing and fondling, at which the bigger girls, with far-off suggestions of sexual mysteries still unexplored, would laugh and shudder, and then Alma would say:

''But hush, girls! Margaret Mary will be shocked.''

Occasionally these conferences would be interrupted by Mildred's voice from the other end of the dormitory, where she would raise her head from her pillow and say:

''Alma Lier, you ought to be ashamed of yourself—keeping that child up when she ought to be asleep, instead of listening to your wicked stories.''

''Helloa, Mother Mildred, is that you?'' Alma would answer, and then the girls would laugh, and Mildred was supposed to be covered with confusion.

One night Sister Angela's footsteps were heard on the stairs, and then the girls flew back to their beds, where, with the furtive instinct of their age and sex, they pretended to be sleeping soundly when the Sister entered the room. But the Sister was not deceived, and walking up the aisle between the beds she said in an angry tone:

''Alma Lier, if this ever occurs again I'll step down to the Reverend Mother and tell her all about you.''

Little as I was, I saw that between Alma and Sister Angela there was a secret feud, which must soon break into open rupture, but for my own part I was entirely happy, being still proud of Alma's protection and only feeling any misgivings when Mildred's melancholy eyes were looking at me.

Thus week followed week until we were close upon Christmas, and the girls, who were to be permitted to go home before the Feast, began to count the days to the holidays. I counted them too, and when anybody talked of her brother I thought of Martin Conrad, though his faithful little figure was fading away from me, and when anybody spoke of her parents I remembered my mother, for whom my affection never failed.

But, within a week from the time for breaking up, the Reverend Mother sent for me, and with a sinking heart I went to her room, knowing well what she was going to say.

"You are not to go home for the holidays this time, my child. You are to remain here, and Sister Angela is to stay to take care of you."

She had a letter from Father Dan, telling her that my mother was still unwell, and for this and other reasons it was considered best that I should not return at Christmas.

Father Dan had written a letter to me also, beginning, "My dear daughter in Jesus" and ending "Yours in Xt," saying it was not his fault that he could not fulfil his promise, but my father was much from home now-a-days and Aunt Bridget was more difficult than ever, so perhaps I should be happier at the Convent.

It was a bitter blow, though the bitterest part of it lay in the fear that the girls would think I was of so little importance to my people that they did not care to see me.

But the girls were too eager about their own concerns to care much about me, and even on the very last day and at the very last moment, when everything was bustle and joy, and boxes were being carried downstairs, and everybody was kissing everybody else and wishing each other a Happy Christmas, and then flying away like mad things, and I alone was being left, Alma herself, before she stepped into a carriage in which a stout lady wearing furs was waiting to receive her, only said:

"By-by, Margaret Mary! Take care of Sister Angela."

Next day the Reverend Mother went off to her cottage at Nemi, and the other nuns and novices to their friends in the country, and then Sister Angela and I were alone in the big empty echoing convent—save for two elderly lay Sisters, who cooked and cleaned for us, and the Chaplain, who lived by himself in a little white hut like a cell which stood at the farthest corner of the garden.

We moved our quarters to a room in the front of the house, so as to look out over the city, and down into the piazza which was full of traffic, and after a while we had many cheerful hours together.

During the days before Christmas we spent our mornings in visiting the churches and basilicas where there were little illuminated models of the Nativity, with the Virgin and the Infant Jesus in the stable among the straw. The afternoons we spent at home in the garden, where the Chaplain, in his black soutane and biretta, was always sitting under the old tree, reading his breviary.

His name was Father Giovanni and he was a tall young man with a long, thin, pale face, and when Sister Angela first took me up to him she said:

"This is our Margaret Mary."

Then his sad face broke into warm sunshine, and he stroked my head, and sent me away to skip with my skipping-rope, while he and Sister Angela sat together under the tree, and afterwards walked to and fro in the avenue between the stone pines and the wall, until they came to his cell in the corner, where she craned her neck at the open door as if she would have liked to go in and make things more tidy and comfortable.

On Christmas Day we had currant cake in honour of the feast, and Sister Angela asked Father Giovanni to come to tea, and he came, and was quite cheerful, so that when the Sister, who was also very happy, signalled to me to take some mistletoe from the bottom of a picture I held it over his head and kissed him from behind. Then he snatched me up in his arms and kissed me back, and we had a great romp round the chairs and tables.

But the Ave Maria began to ring from the churches, and Father Giovanni (according to the rule of our Convent) having to go, he kissed me again, and then I said:

"Why don't you kiss Sister Angela too?"

At that they only looked at each other and laughed, but after a moment he kissed her hand, and then she went downstairs to see him out into the garden.

When she came back her eyes were sparkling and her cheeks were flushed, and, that night, when she took away her black and white whimple and gorget on going to bed, she stood before a looking-glass and wound her beautiful light hair round her finger and curled it over her forehead in the way it was worn by the ladies we saw in the streets.

I think it was two nights later that she told me I was to go to bed early because Father Giovanni was not well and she would have to go over to see him.

She went, and I got into bed, but I could not sleep, and while I lay waiting for Sister Angela I listened to some men who as they crossed the piazza were singing, in tremulous voices, to their mandolines and guitars, what I believed to be love songs, for I had begun to learn Italian.

"Oh bella Napoli. Oh suol beato
Onde soiridere volla il creato."

It was late when Sister Angela came back and then she was breathing hard as if she had been running. I asked if Father Giovanni's sickness was worse, and she said no, it was better, and I was to say nothing about it. But she could not rest and at last she said:

"Didn't we forget to say our prayers, Mary?"

So I got up again and Sister Angela said one of the beautiful prayers out of our prayer-book. But her voice was very low and when she came to the words:

"O Father of all mankind, forgive all sinners who repent of their sins," she broke down altogether.

I thought she was ill, but she said it was only a cold she had caught in crossing the garden and I was to go to sleep like a good girl and think no more about her.

But in the middle of the night I awoke, and Sister Angela was crying.

FIFTEENTH CHAPTER

Most of the girls were depressed when they returned to school, but Alma was in high spirits, and on the first night of the term she crept over to my bed and asked what we had been doing during the holidays.

"Not a thing, eh?"

I answered that we had done lots of things and been very happy.

"Happy? In this gloomy old convent? You and Sister Angela alone?"

I told her we had two lay sisters—and then there was Father Giovanni.

"Father Giovanni? That serious old cross-bones?"

I said he was not always serious, and that on Christmas Day he had come to tea and kissed me under the mistletoe.

"Kissed you under the mistletoe!" said Alma, and then she whispered eagerly,

"He didn't kiss Sister Angela, did he?"

I suppose I was flattered by her interest, and this loosened my tongue, for I answered:

"He kissed her hand, though."

"Kissed her hand? My! . . . Of course she was very angry . . . wasn't she angry?"

I answered no, and in my simplicity I proceeded to prove this by explaining that Sister Angela had taken Father Giovanni down to the door, and when he was ill she had nursed him.

"Nursed him? In his own house, you mean?"

"Yes, at night, too, and she stayed until he was better, and caught a cold coming back."

"Well, I never!" said Alma, and I remember that I was very pleased with myself during this interview, for by the moonlight which was then shining into the room, I could see that Alma's eyes were sparkling.

The next night we recommenced our conferences in bed, when Alma told us all about her holiday, which she had spent "way up in St. Moritz," among deep snow and thick ice, skating, bobbing, lugging, and above all riding astride, and dragging a man on skis behind her.

"Such lots of fun," she said. And the best of it was at night when there were dances and fancy-dress balls with company which included all the smart people in Europe, and men who gave a girl such a good time if she happened to be pretty and was likely to have a dot.

Alma had talked so eagerly and the girls had listened so intently, that nobody was aware that Sister Angela had returned to the room until she stepped forward and said:

"Alma Lier, I'm ashamed of you. Go back to your bed, miss, this very minute."

The other girls crept away and I half covered my face with my bed-clothes, but Alma stood up to Sister Angela and answered her back.

"Go to bed yourself, and don't speak to me like that, or you'll pay for your presumption."

"Pay? Presumption? You insolent thing, you are corrupting the whole school and are an utter disgrace to it. I warned you that I would tell the Reverend Mother what you are, and now I've a great mind to do it."

"Do it. I dare you to do it. Do it to-night, and to-morrow morning *I* will do something."

"What will you do, you brazen hussy?" said Sister Angela, but I could see that her lip was trembling.

"Never mind what. If I'm a hussy I'm not a hypocrite, and as for corrupting the school, and being a disgrace to it, I'll leave the Reverend Mother to say who is doing that."

Low as the light was I could see that Sister Angela was deadly pale. There was a moment of silence in which I thought she glanced in my direction, and then stammering something which I did not hear, she left the dormitory.

It was long before she returned, and when she did so I saw her creep into her cubicle and sit there for quite a great time before going to bed. My heart was thumping hard, for I had a vague feeling that I had been partly to blame for what had occurred, but after a while I fell asleep and remembered no more until I was awakened in the middle of the night by somebody kissing me in my sleep.

It was Sister Angela, and she was turning away, but I called her back, and she knelt by my bed and whispered:

"Hush! I know what has happened, but I don't blame you for it."

I noticed that she was wearing her out-door cloak, and that she was breathing rapidly, just as she did on the night she came from the chaplain's quarters, and when I asked if she was going anywhere she said yes, and if I ever heard anything against Sister Angela I was to think the best of her.

"But you are so good . . ."

"No, I am not good. I am very wicked. I should never have thought of being a nun, but I'm glad now that I'm only a novice and have never taken the vows."

After that she told me to go to sleep, and then she kissed me again, and I thought she was going to cry, but she rose hurriedly and left the room.

Next morning after the getting-up bell had been rung, and I had roused myself to full consciousness, I found that four or five nuns were standing together near the door of the dormitory talking about something that had happened during the night—Sister Angela had gone!

Half an hour afterwards when, full of this exciting event, the girls went bustling down to the Meeting Room they found the nuns in great agitation over an incident of still deeper gravity—Father Giovanni also had disappeared!

A convent school is like a shell on the shore of a creek, always rumbling with the rumour of the little sea it lives under; and by noon the girls, who had been palpitating with curiosity, thought they knew everything that had happened—how at four in the morning Father Giovanni and Sister Angela had been seen to come out of the little door which connected the garden with the street; how at seven they had entered a clothing emporium in the Corso, where going in at one door as priest and nun they had come out at another as ordinary civilians; how at eight they had taken the first train to Civita Vecchia, arriving in time to catch a steamer sailing at ten, and how they were now on their way to England.

By some mysterious instinct of their sex the girls had gathered with glistening eyes in front of the chaplain's deserted quarters, where Alma leaned against the wall with her insteps crossed and while the others talked she smiled, as much as to say, "I told you so."

As for me I was utterly wretched, and being now quite certain that I was the sole cause of Sister Angela's misfortune, I was sitting under the tree in the middle of the garden, when Alma, surrounded by her usual group of girls, came down on me.

"What's this?" she said. "Margaret Mary crying? Feeling badly for Sister Angela, is she? Why, you little silly, you needn't cry for her. She's having the time of her life, she is!"

At this the girls laughed and shuddered, as they used to do when Alma told them stories, but just at that moment the nun with the stern face (she was the Mother of the Novices) came up and said, solemnly:

"Alma Lier, the Reverend Mother wishes to speak to you."

"To me?" said Alma, in a tone of surprise, but at the next moment she went off jauntily.

Hours passed and Alma did not return, and nothing occurred until afternoon "rosary," when the Mother of the Novices came again and taking me by the hand said:

"Come with me, my child."

I knew quite well where we were going to, and my lip was trembling when we entered the Reverend Mother's room, for Alma was there, sitting by the stove, and close beside her, with an angry look, was the stout lady in furs whom I had seen in the carriage at the beginning of the holidays.

"Don't be afraid," said the Reverend Mother, and drawing me to her side she asked me to tell her what I had told Alma about Sister Angela.

I repeated our conversation as nearly as I could remember it, and more than once Alma nodded her head as if in assent, but the Reverend Mother's face grew darker at every word and, seeing this, I said:

"But if Sister Angela did anything wrong I'm sure she was very sorry, for when she came back she said her prayers, and when she got to 'Father of all mankind, forgive all sinners . . .'"

"Yes, yes, that will do," said the Reverend Mother, and then she handed me back to the Mother of the Novices, telling her to warn me to say nothing to the other children.

Alma did not return to us at dinner, or at recreation, or at chapel (when another chaplain said vespers), or even at nine o'clock, when we went to bed. But next morning, almost as soon as the Mother of the Novices had left the dormitory, she burst into the room saying:

"I'm leaving this silly old convent, girls. Mother has brought the carriage, and I've only come to gather up my belongings."

Nobody spoke, and while she wrapped up her brushes and combs in her nightdress, she joked about Sister Angela and Father Giovanni and then about Mildred Bankes, whom she called "Reverend Mother Mildred," saying it would be her turn next.

Then she tipped up her mattress, and taking a novel from under it she threw the book on to my bed, saying:

"Margaret Mary will have to be your story-teller now. By-by, girls!"

Nobody laughed. For the first time Alma's humour had failed her, and when we went downstairs to the Meeting Room it was with sedate and quiet steps.

The nuns were all there, with their rosaries and crosses, looking as calm as if nothing had occurred, but the girls were thinking of Alma, and when, after prayers, during the five minutes of silence for meditation, we heard the wheels of a carriage going off outside, we knew what had happened—Alma had gone.

We were rising to go to Mass when the Reverend Mother said,

"Children, I have a word to say to you. You all know that one of our novices has left us. You also know that one of our scholars has just gone. It is my wish that you should forget both of them, and I shall look upon it as an act of disobedience if any girl in the Convent ever mentions their names again."

All that day I was in deep distress, and when, night coming, I took my troubles to bed, telling myself I had now lost Alma also, and it was all my fault, somebody put her arms about me in the darkness and whispered:

"Mary O'Neill, are you awake?"

It was Mildred, and I suppose my snuffling answered her, for she said:

"You mustn't cry for Alma Lier. She was no friend of yours, and it was the best thing that ever happened to you when she was turned out of the convent."

SIXTEENTH CHAPTER

A CHILD lives from hour to hour, and almost at the same moment that my heart was made desolate by the loss of my two friends it was quickened to a new interest.

Immediately after the departure of Sister Angela and Alma we were all gathered in the Meeting Room for our weekly rehearsal of the music of the Benediction—the girls, the novices, the nuns, the Reverend Mother, and a Maestro from the Pope's choir, a short fat man, who wore a black soutane and a short lace tippet.

Benediction was the only service of our church which I knew, being the one my mother loved best and could do most of for herself in the solitude of her invalid room, but the form used in the Convent differed from that to which I had been accustomed, and even the *Tantum ergo* and the *O Salutaris Hostia* I could not sing.

On this occasion a litany was added which I had heard before, and then came a hymn of the Blessed Virgin which I remembered well. My mother sang it herself and taught me to sing it, so that when the Maestro, swinging his little ivory baton, began in his alto voice—

"Ave maris stella,
Dei Mater alma—"

I joined in with the rest, but sang in English instead of Latin.

Of all appeals to the memory that of music is the strongest, and after a moment I forgot that I was at school in Rome, being back in my mother's room in Ellan, standing by her piano and singing while she played. I think I must have let my little voice go, just as I used to do at home, when it rang up to the wooden rafters, for utterly lost to my surroundings I had got as far as—

"Virgin of all virgins,
To thy shelter take us—"

when suddenly I became aware that I alone was singing, the children about me being silent, and even the Maestro's baton slowing down. Then I saw that all eyes were turned in my direction, and overwhelmed with confusion I stopped, for my voice broke and slittered into silence.

"Go on, little angel," said the Maestro, but I was trembling all over by this time and could not utter a sound.

Nevertheless the Reverend Mother said: "Let Mary O'Neill sing the hymn in church in future."

As soon as I had conquered my nervousness at singing in the presence of the girls, I did so, singing the first line of each verse alone, and I remember to have heard that the congregations on Sunday afternoons grew larger and larger, until, within a few weeks, the church was densely crowded.

Perhaps my childish heart was stirred by vanity in all this, for I remember that ladies in beautiful dresses would crowd to the bronze screen that separated us from the public and whisper among themselves, "Which is she?" "The little one in the green scarf with the big eyes!" "God bless her!"

But surely it was a good thing that at length life had begun to have a certain joy for me, for as time went on I became absorbed in the life of the Convent, and particularly in the services of the church, so that home itself began to fade away, and when the holidays came round and excuses were received for not sending for me, the pain of my disappointment became less and less until at last it disappeared altogether.

If ever a child loved her mother I did, and there were moments when I reproached myself with not thinking of her for a whole day. These were the moments when a letter came from Father Dan, telling me she was less well than before and her spark of life had to be coaxed and trimmed or it would splutter out altogether.

But the effect of such warnings was wiped away when my mother wrote herself, saying I was to be happy as she was happy, because she knew that though so long separated we should soon be together, and the time would not seem long.

Not understanding the deeper meaning that lay behind words like these, I was nothing loath to put aside the thought of home until little by little it faded away from me in the distance, just as the island itself had done on the day when I sailed out with Martin Conrad on our great voyage of exploration to St. Mary's Rock.

Thus two years and a half passed since I arrived in Rome before the great fact befell me which was to wipe all other facts out of my remembrance.

It was Holy Week, the season of all seasons for devotion to the Sacred Heart, and our Convent was palpitating with the joy of its spiritual duties, the many offices, the masses for the repose of the souls in Purgatory, the preparations for Tenebrae, with the chanting of the Miserere, and for Holy Saturday and Easter Day, with the singing of the Gloria and the return of the Alleluia.

But beyond all this for me were the arrangements for my first confession, which, coming a little late, I made with ten or twelve other girls of my sodality, feeling so faint when I took my turn and knelt by the grating, and heard the whispering voice within, like something from the unseen, something supernatural, something divine, that I forgot all I had come to say and the priest had to prompt me.

And beyond that again were the arrangements for my first communion, which was to take place on Easter morning, when I was to walk in procession with the other girls, dressed all in white, behind a gilded figure of the Virgin, singing "Ave maris stella," through the piazza into the church, where one of the Cardinals, in the presence of the fathers and mothers of the other children, was to put the Holy Wafer on our tongues and we were to know for the first time the joy of communion with our Lord.

But that was not to be for me.

On the morning of Holy Wednesday the blow fell. The luminous grey of the Italian dawn was filtering through the windows of the dormitory, like the light in a tomb, and a multitude of little birds on the old tree in the garden were making a noise like water falling on small stones in a fountain, when the Mother of the Novices came to my bedside and said:

"You are to go to the Reverend Mother as soon as possible, my child."

Her voice, usually severe, was so soft that I knew something had happened, and when I went downstairs I also knew, before the Reverend Mother had spoken, what she was going to say.

"Mary," she said, "I am sorry to tell you that your mother is ill."

I listened intently, fearing that worse would follow.

"She is very ill—very seriously ill, and she wishes to see you. Therefore you are to go home immediately."

The tears sprang to my eyes, and the Reverend Mother drew me to her side and laid my head on her breast and comforted me, saying my dear mother had lived the life of a good Christian and could safely trust in the redeeming blood of our Blessed Saviour. But I thought she must have some knowledge of the conditions of my life at home, for she told me that whatever happened I was to come back to her.

"Tell your father you *wish* to come back to me," she said, and then she explained the arrangements that were being made for my journey.

I was to travel alone by the Paris express which left Rome at six o'clock that evening. The Mother of the Novices was to put me in a sleeping car and see that the greatest care would be taken of me until I arrived at Calais, where Father Donovan was to meet the train and take me home.

I cried a great deal, I remember, but everybody in the Convent was kind, and when, of my own choice, I returned to the girls at recreation, the sinister sense of dignity which by some strange irony of fate comes to all children when the Angel of Death is hovering over them, came to me also—poor, helpless innocent—and I felt a certain distinction in my sorrow.

At five o'clock the omnibus of the Convent had been brought round to the door, and I was seated in one corner of it, with the Mother of the Novices in front of me, when Mildred Bankes came running breathlessly downstairs to say that the Reverend Mother had given her permission to see me off.

Half an hour later Mildred and I were sitting in a compartment of the Wagon-Lit, while the Mother was talking to the conductor on the platform.

Mildred, whose eyes were wet, was saying something about herself which seems pitiful enough now in the light of what has happened since.

She was to leave the Convent soon, and before I returned to it she would be gone. She was poor and an orphan, both her parents being dead, and if she had her own way she would become a nun. In any case our circumstances would be so different, our ways of life so far apart, that we might never meet again; but if . . .

Before she had finished a bell rang on the platform, and a moment or two afterwards the train slid out of the station.

Then for the first time I began to realise the weight of the blow that had fallen on me. I was sitting alone in my big compartment, we were running into the Campagna, the heavens were ablaze with the glory of the sunset, which was like fields of glistening fire, but darkness seemed to have fallen on all the world.

SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER

Early on Good Friday I arrived at Calais. It was a misty, rimy, clammy morning, and a thick fog was lying over the Channel.

Almost before the train stopped I saw Father Dan, with his coat collar turned up, waiting for me on the platform. I could see that he was greatly moved at the sight of me, but was trying hard to maintain his composure.

''Now don't worry, my child, don't worry,'' he said. ''It will be all ri . . . But how well you are looking! And how you have grown! And how glad your poor mother will be to see you!''

I tried to ask how she was. ''Is she . . .''

''Yes, thank God, she's alive, and while there's life there's hope.''

We travelled straight through without stopping and arrived at Blackwater at seven the same evening. There we took train, for railways were running in Ellan now, and down the sweet valleys that used to be green with grass, and through the little crofts that used to be red with fuchsia, there was a long raw welt of upturned earth.

At the station of our village my father's carriage was waiting for us and a strange footman shrugged his shoulders in answer to some whispered question of Father Dan's, and from that I gathered that my mother's condition was unchanged.

We reached home at dusk, just as somebody was lighting a line of new electric lamps that had been set up in the drive to show the way for the carriage under the chestnuts in which the rooks used to build and caw.

I knew the turn of the path from which the house could be first seen, and I looked for it, remembering the last glimpse I had of my mother at her window. Father Dan looked, too, but for another reason—to see if the blinds were down.

Aunt Bridget was in the hall, and when Father Dan, who had grown more and more excited as we approached the end of our journey, asked how my mother was now, poor thing, she answered:

"Worse; distinctly worse; past recognising anybody; so all this trouble and expense has been wasted."

As she had barely recognised me I ran upstairs with a timid and quiet step and without waiting to take off my outer clothes made my way to my mother's bedroom.

I remember the heavy atmosphere of the room as I opened the door. I remember the sense I had of its being lower and smaller than I thought. I remember the black four-foot bedstead with the rosary hanging on a brass nail at the pillow end. I remember my little cot which still stood in the same place and contained some of the clothes I had worn as a child, and even some of the toys I had played with.

A strange woman, in the costume of a nurse, turned to look at me as I entered, but I did not at first see my mother, and when at length I did see her, with her eyes closed, she looked so white and small as to be almost hidden in the big white bed.

Presently Father Dan came in, followed by Doctor Conrad and Aunt Bridget, and finally my father, who was in his shirt sleeves and had a pen in his ear, I remember.

Then Father Dan, who was trembling very much, took me by the hand and led me to my mother's side, where stooping over her, and making his voice very low, yet speaking as one who was calling into a long tunnel, he said:

"My daughter! My daughter! Here is our little Mary. She has come home to see you."

Never shall I forget what followed. First, my mother's long lashes parted and she looked at me with a dazed expression as if still in a sort of dream. Then her big eyes began to blaze like torches in dark hollows, and then (though they had thought her strength was gone and her voice would never be heard again) she raised herself in her bed, stretched out her arms to me, and cried in loud strong tones:

"Mally veen! My Mally veen!"

How long I lay with my arms about my mother, and my mother's arms about me I do not know. I only know that over my head I heard Father Dan saying, as if speaking to a child:

"You are happy now, are you not?"

"Yes, yes, I am happy now," my mother answered.

"You have everything you want?"

"Everything—everything!"

Then came my father's voice, saying:

"Well, you've got your girl, Isabel. You wanted her, so we sent for her, and here she is."

"You have been very good to me, Daniel," said my mother, who was kissing my forehead and crying in her joy.

When I raised my head I found Father Dan in great excitement.

"Did you see that then?" he was saying to Doctor Conrad. "I would have gone on my knees all the way to Blackwater to see it."

"I couldn't have believed it possible," the Doctor replied.

"Ah, what children we are, entirely. God confounds all our reckoning. We can't count with His miracles. And the greatest of all miracles is a mother's love for her child."

"Let us leave her now, though," said the Doctor. "She's like herself again, but still . . ."

"Yes, let us leave them together," whispered Father Dan, and having swept everybody out before him (I thought Aunt Bridget went away ashamed) he stepped off himself on tiptoe, as if treading on holy ground.

Then my mother, who was holding my hand and sometimes putting it to her lips, said:

"Tell me everything that has happened."

As soon as my little tongue was loosed I told her all about my life at the Convent—about the Reverend Mother and the nuns and the novices and the girls (all except Sister Angela and Alma) and the singing of the hymn to the Virgin—talking on and on and on, without observing that, after a while, my mother's eyes had closed again, and that her hand had become cold and moist.

At length she said: "Is it getting dark, Mary?"

I told her it was night and the lamp was burning.

"Is it going out then?" she asked, and when I answered that it was not she did not seem to hear, so I stopped talking, and for some time there was silence in which I heard nothing but the ticking of the clock on the mantelpiece, the barking of a sheep dog a long way off, and the husky breathing in my mother's throat.

I was beginning to be afraid when the nurse returned. She was going to speak quite cheerfully, but after a glance at my mother she went out quickly and came back in a moment with Doctor Conrad and Father Dan.

I heard the doctor say something about a change, whereupon Father Dan hurried away, and in a moment there was much confusion. The nurse spoke of taking me to another room but the doctor said:

"No, our little woman will be brave," and then leading me aside he whispered that God was sending for my mother and I must be quiet and not cry.

Partly undressing I climbed into my cot and lay still for the next half hour, while the doctor held his hand on my mother's pulse and the nurse spread a linen cloth over a table and put four or five lighted candles on it.

I remember that I was thinking that if "God sending for my mother" meant that she was to be put into a box and buried under the ground it was terrible and cruel, and perhaps if I prayed to our Lady He would not find it in His heart to do so. I was trying to do this, beginning under my breath, "O Holy Virgin, thou art so lovely, thou art so gracious . . ." when the nurse said:

"Here they are back again."

Then I heard footsteps outside, and going to the window I saw a sight not unlike that which I had seen on the night of the Waits.

A group of men were coming towards the house, with Father Dan in the middle of them. Father Dan, with his coat hung over his arms like a cloak, was carrying something white in both hands, and the men were carrying torches to light him on his way.

I knew what it was—it was the Blessed Sacrament, which they were bringing to my mother, and when Father Dan had come into the room, saying "Peace be to this house," and laid a little white box on the table, and thrown off his coat, he was wearing his priest's vestments underneath.

Then the whole of my father's household—all except my father himself—came into my mother's room, including Aunt Bridget, who sat with folded arms in the darkness by the wall, and the servants, who knelt in a group by the door.

Father Dan roused my mother by calling to her again, and after she had opened her eyes he began to read. Sometimes his voice seemed to be choked with sobs, as if the heart of the man were suffering, and sometimes it pealed out loudly as if the soul of the priest were inspiring him.

After Communion he gave my mother Extreme Unction—anointing the sweet eyes which had seen no evil, the dear lips which had uttered no wrong, and the feet which had walked in the ways of God.

All this time there was a solemn hush in the house like that of a church—no sound within except my father's measured tread in the room below, and none without except the muffled murmur which the sea makes when it is far away and going out.

When all was over my mother seemed more at ease, and after asking for me and being told I was in the cot, she said:

"You must all go and rest. Mary and I will be quite right now."

A few minutes afterwards my mother and I were alone once more, and then she called me into her bed and clasped her arms about me and I lay with my face hidden in her neck.

What happened thereafter seems to be too sacred to write of, almost too sacred to think about, yet it is all as a memory of yesterday, while other events of my life have floated away to the ocean of things that are forgotten and lost.

"Listen, darling," she said, and then, speaking in whispers, she told me she had heard all I had said about the Convent, and wondered if I would not like to live there always, becoming one of the good and holy nuns.

I must have made some kind of protest, for she went on to say how hard the world was to a woman and how difficult she had found it.

"Not that your father has been to blame—you must never think that, Mary, yet still . . ."

But tears from her tender heart were stealing down her face and she had to stop.

Even yet I had not realised all that the solemn time foreboded, for I said something about staying with my mother; and then in her sweet voice, she told me nervously, breaking the news to me gently, that she was going to leave me, that she was going to heaven, but she would think of me when she was there, and if God permitted she would watch over me, or, if that might not be, she would ask our Lady to do so.

"So you see we shall never be parted, never really. We shall always be together. Something tells me that wherever you are, and whatever you are doing, I shall know all about it."

This comforted me, and I think it comforted my mother also, though God knows if it would have done so, if, with her dying eyes, she could have seen what was waiting for her child.

It fills my heart brimful to think of what happened next.

She told me to say a *De Profundis* for her sometimes, and to think of her when I sang the hymn to the Virgin. Then she kissed me and told me to go to sleep, saying she was going to sleep too, and if it should prove to be the eternal sleep, it would be only like going to sleep at night and awaking in the morning, and then we should be together again, and "the time between would not seem long."

"So good-night, darling, and God bless you," she said.

And as well as I could I answered her "Good-night!"

When I awoke from the profound slumber of childhood it was noon of the next day and the sun was shining. Doctor Conrad was lifting me out of bed, and Father Dan, who had just thrown open the window, was saying in a tremulous voice:

"Your dear mother has gone to God."

I began to cry, but he checked me and said:

"Don't call her back. She's on her way to God's beautiful Paradise after all her suffering. Let her go!"

So I lost her, my mother, my saint, my angel.

It was Easter Eve, and the church bells were ringing the Gloria.

EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER

After my mother's death there was no place left for me in my father's house.

Betsy Beauty (who was now called Miss Betsy and gave herself more than ever the airs of the daughter of the family) occupied half her days with the governess who had been engaged to teach her, and the other half in driving, dressed in beautiful clothes, to the houses of the gentry round about.

Nessy MacLeod, called the young mistress, had become my father's secretary, and spent most of her time in his private room, a privilege which enlarged her pride without improving her manners.

Martin Conrad I did not see, for in reward for some success at school the doctor had allowed him to spend his Easter holidays in London in order to look at Nansen's ship, the *Fram,* which had just then arrived in the Thames.

Hence it happened that though home made a certain tug at me, with its familiar sights and sounds, and more than once I turned with timid steps towards my father's busy room, intending to say, "Please, father, don't send me back to school," I made no demur when, six or seven days after the funeral, Aunt Bridget began to prepare for my departure.

"There's odds of women," said Tommy the Mate, when I went into the garden to say good-bye to him. "They're like sheep's broth, is women. If there's a head and a heart in them they're good, and if there isn't you might as well be supping hot water. Our Big Woman is hot water—but she'll die for all."

Within a fortnight I was back at the Convent, and there the Reverend Mother atoned to me for every neglect.

"I knew you would come back to me," she said, and from that hour onward she seemed to be trying to make up to me for the mother I had lost.

I became deeply devoted to her. As a consequence her spirit became my spirit, and, little by little, the religious side of the life of the Convent took complete possession of me.

At first I loved the church and its services because the Reverend Mother loved them, and perhaps also for the sake of the music, the incense, the flowers and the lights on the altar; but after I had taken my communion, the mysteries of our religion took hold of me—the Confessional with its sense of cleansing and the unutterable sweetness of the Mass.

For a long time there was nothing to disturb this religious side of my mind. My father never sent for me, and as often as the holidays came round the Reverend Mother took me with her to her country home at Nemi.

That was a beautiful place—a sweet white cottage, some twenty kilometres from Rome, at the foot of Monte Cavo, in the middle of the remains of a mediæval village which contained a castle and a monastery, and had a little blue lake lying like an emerald among the green and red of the grass and poppies in the valley below.

In the hot months of summer the place was like a Paradise to me, with its roses growing wild by the wayside; its green lizards running on the rocks; its goats; its sheep; its vineyards; its brown-faced boys in velvet, and its gleesome girls in smart red petticoats and gorgeous outside stays; its shrines and its blazing sunsets, which seemed to girdle the heavens with quivering bands of purple and gold.

Years went by without my being aware of their going, for after a while I became entirely happy.

I heard frequently from home. Occasionally it was from Betsy Beauty, who had not much to say beyond stories of balls at Government House, where she had danced with the young Lord Raa, and of hunts at which she had ridden with him. More rarely it was from Aunt Bridget, who usually began by complaining of the ever-increasing cost of my convent clothes and ended with accounts of her daughter's last new costume and how well she looked in it.

From Nessy MacLeod and my father I never heard at all, but Father Dan was my constant correspondent and he told me everything.

First of my father himself—that he had carried out many of his great enterprises, his marine works, electric railways, drinking and dancing palaces, which had brought tens of thousands of visitors and hundreds of thousands of pounds to Ellan, though the good Father doubted the advantage of such innovations and lamented the decline of piety which had followed on the lust for wealth.

Next of Aunt Bridget—that she was bringing up her daughter in the ways of worldly vanity and cherishing a serpent in her bosom (meaning Nessy MacLeod) who would poison her heart some day.

Next, of Tommy the Mate—that he sent his "best respec's" to the "lil-missy" but thought she was well out of the way of the Big Woman who "was getting that highty-tighty" that "you couldn't say Tom to a cat before her but she was agate of you to make it Thomas."

Then of Martin Conrad—that he was at college "studying for a doctor," but his heart was still at the North Pole and he was "like a sea-gull in the nest of a wood pigeon," always longing to be out on the wild waves.

Finally of the young Lord Raa—that the devil's dues must be in the man, for after being "sent down" from Oxford he had wasted his substance in riotous living in London, and his guardian had been heard to say he must marry a rich wife soon or his estates would go to the hammer.

Such was the substance of the news that reached me over a period of six years. Yet welcome as were Father Dan's letters the life they described seemed less and less important to me as time went on, for the outer world was slipping away from me altogether and I was becoming more and more immersed in my spiritual exercises.

I spent much of my time reading religious books—the life of Saint Teresa, the meditations of Saint Francis of Sales, and, above all, the letters and prayers of our Blessed Margaret Mary Alacoque, whose love of the Sacred Heart was like a flaming torch to my excited spirit.

The soul of Rome, too, seemed to enter into my soul—not the new Rome, for of that I knew nothing, but the old Rome, the holy city, that could speak to me in the silence of the night within the walls of my convent-school, with its bells of the Dominican and Franciscan monasteries on either side, its stories of miracles performed on the sick and dying by the various shrines of the Madonna, its accounts of the vast multitudes of the faithful who came from all ends of the earth to the ceremonials at St. Peter's, and, above all, its sense of the immediate presence of the Pope, half a mile away, the Vicar and mouthpiece of God Himself.

The end of it all was that I wished to become a nun. I said nothing of my desire to anybody, not even to the Reverend Mother, but day by day my resolution grew.

Perhaps it was natural that the orphaned and homeless girl should plunge with all this passion into the aurora of a new spiritual life; but when I think how my nature was made for love, human love, the love of husband and children, I cannot but wonder with a thrill of the heart whether my mother in heaven, who, while she was on earth, had fought so hard with my father for the body of her child, was now fighting with him for her soul.

I was just eighteen years of age when my desire to become a nun reached its highest point, and then received its final overthrow.

Mildred Bankes, who had returned to Rome, and was living as a novice with the Little Sisters of the Poor, was about to make her vows, and the Reverend Mother took me to see the ceremony.

Never shall I forget the effect of it. The sweet summer morning, tingling with snow-white sunshine, the little white chapel in the garden of the Convent, covered with flowers, the altar with its lighted tapers, the friends from without clad in gay costumes as for a festival, the bishop in his bright vestments, and then, Mildred herself, dressed as a bride in a beautiful white gown with a long white veil and attended by other novices as bridesmaids.

It was just like a marriage to look upon, except for the absence of a visible bridegroom, the invisible one being Christ. And the taking of the vows was like a marriage service too—only more solemn and sacred and touching—the bride receiving the ring on her finger, and promising to serve and worship her celestial lover from that day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, as long as life should last and through the eternity that was to follow it.

I cried all through the ceremony for sheer joy of its loveliness; and when it was over and we went into the refectory, and Mildred told me she was returning to England to work among the fallen girls of London, I vowed in my heart, though I hardly understood what she was going to do, that I would follow her example.

It was something of a jar to go back into the streets, so full of noise and bustle; and all the way home with the Reverend Mother I was forming the resolution of telling her that very night that I meant to be a nun, for, stirred to the depths of my soul by what I had seen and remembering what my poor mother had wished for me, I determined that no other life would I live under any circumstances.

Then came the shock.

As we drew up at our door a postman was delivering letters. One of them was for the Reverend Mother and I saw in a moment that it was in my father's handwriting. She read it in silence, and in silence she handed it to me. It ran:

"Madam,

"I have come to Rome to take back my daughter. I believe her education will now be finished, and I reckon the time has arrived to prepare her for the change in life that is before her.

"The Bishop of our diocese has come with me, and we propose to pay our respects to you at ten o'clock prompt to-morrow morning.

"Yours, Madam,

"DANIEL O'NEILL."

NINETEENTH CHAPTER

I SAW, as by a flash of light, what was before me, and my whole soul rose in rebellion against it. That my father after all the years during which he had neglected me, should come to me now, when my plans were formed, and change the whole current of my life, was an outrage—an iniquity. It might be his right—his natural right—but if so his natural right was a spiritual wrong—and I would resist it—to my last breath and my last hour I would resist it.

Such were the brave thoughts with which I passed that night, but at ten o'clock next morning, when I was summoned to meet my father himself, it was on trembling limbs and with a quivering heart that I went down to the Reverend Mother's room.

Except that his hair was whiter than before my father was not much changed. He rose as I entered, saying, "Here she is herself," and when I went up to him he put his hands on my shoulders and looked into my face.

"Quite a little Italian woman grown! Like your mother though," he said, and then speaking over my head to the Bishop, who sat on the other side of the room, he added:

"Guess this will do, Bishop, eh?"

"Perfectly," said the Bishop.

I was colouring in confusion at the continued scrutiny, with a feeling of being looked over for some unexplained purpose, when the Reverend Mother called me, and turning to go to her I saw, by the look of pain on her face that she, too, had been hurt by it.

She put me to sit on a stool by the side of her chair, and taking my right hand she laid it in her lap and held it there during the whole of the interview.

The Bishop, whom I had never seen before, was the first to speak. He was a type of the fashionable ecclesiastic, suave, smiling, faultlessly dressed in silk soutane and silver buckled shoes, and wearing a heavy gold chain with a jewelled cross.

"Reverend Mother," he said, "you would gather from Mr. O'Neill's letter that he wishes to remove his daughter immediately—I presume there will be no difficulty in his doing so?"

The Reverend Mother did not speak, but I think she must have bent her head.

"Naturally," said the Bishop, "there will be a certain delay while suitable clothes are being made for her, but I have no doubt you will give Mr. O'Neill your help in these preparations.''

My head was down, and I did not see if the Reverend Mother bowed again. But the two gentlemen, apparently satisfied with her silence, began to talk of the best date for my removal, and just when I was quivering with fear that without a word of protest I was to be taken away, the Reverend Mother said:

''Monsignor!''

''Reverend Mother!''

''You are aware that this child''—here she patted my trembling hand—''has been with me for ten years?''

''I am given to understand so.''

''And that during that time she has only once been home?''

''I was not aware—but no doubt it is as you say.''

''In short, that during the greater part of her life she has been left to my undivided care?''

''You have been very good to her, very, and I'm sure her family are extremely grateful.''

''In that case, Monsignor, doesn't it seem to you that I am entitled to know why she is being so suddenly taken away from me, and what is the change in life which Mr. O'Neill referred to in his letter?''

The smile which had been playing upon the Bishop's face was smitten away from it by that question, and he looked anxiously across at my father.

''Tell her,'' said my father, and then, while my heart thumped in my bosom and the Reverend Mother stroked my hand to compose me, the Bishop gave a brief explanation.

The time had not come when it would be prudent to be more definite, but he might say that Mr. O'Neill was trying to arrange a happy and enviable future for his daughter, and therefore he wished her to return home to prepare for it.

''Does that mean marriage?'' said the Reverend Mother.

''It may be so. I am not quite prepared to . . .''

''And that a husband has already been found for her?''

''That too perhaps. I will not say . . .''

''Monsignor,'' said the Reverend Mother, sitting up with dignity, ''is that fair?''

''Fair?''

''Is it fair that after ten years in which her father has done nothing for her, he should determine what her life is to be, without regard to her wish and will?''

I raised my eyes and saw that the Bishop looked aghast.

"Reverend Mother, you surprise me," he said. "Since when has a father ceased to be the natural guardian of his child? Has he not been so since the beginning of the world? Doesn't the Church itself build its laws on that foundation?"

"Does it?" said the Reverend Mother shortly. And then (I could feel her hand trembling as she spoke): "Some of its servants do, I know. But when did the Church say that anybody—no matter who—a father or anybody else—should take the soul of another, and control it and govern it, and put it in prison? . . ."

"My good lady," said the Bishop, "would you call it putting the girl in prison to marry her into an illustrious family, to give her an historic name, to surround her with the dignity and distinction . . ."

"Bishop," said my father, raising his hand, "I guess it's my right to butt in here, isn't it?"

I saw that my father's face had been darkening while the Reverend Mother spoke, and now, rolling his heavy body in his chair so as to face her, he said:

"Excuse me, ma'am, but when you say I've done nothing for my gel here I suppose you'll allow I've kept her and educated her?"

"You've kept and educated your dogs and horses, also, I dare say, but do you claim the same rights over a human being?"

"I do, ma'am—I think I do. And when the human being happens to be my own daughter I don't allow that anybody else has anything to say."

"If her mother were alive would *she* have nothing to say?"

I thought my father winced at that word, but he answered:

"Her mother would agree to anything I thought best."

"Her mother, so far as I can see, was a most unselfish, most submissive, most unhappy woman," said the Reverend Mother.

My father glanced quickly at me and then, after a moment, he said:

"I'm obliged to you, ma'am, much obliged. But as I'm not a man to throw words away I'll ask you to tell me what all this means. Does it mean that you've made plans of your own for my daughter without consulting me?"

"No, sir."

"Then perhaps it means that the gel herself . . ."

"That may be so or not—I cannot say. But when you sent your daughter to a convent-school . . ."

"Wrong, ma'am, wrong for once. It was my wife's sister—who thinks the gel disobedient and rebellious and unruly . . ."

"Then your wife's sister is either a very stupid or a very bad-hearted woman."

"Ma'am?"

"I have known your daughter longer than she has, and there isn't a word of truth in what she says."

It was as much as I could do not to fall on the Reverend Mother's neck, but I clung to her hand with a convulsive grasp.

"May be so, ma'am, may be no," said my father. "But when you talk about my sending my daughter to a convent-school I would have you know that I've been so busy with my business . . ."

"That you haven't had time to take care of the most precious thing God gave you."

"Ma'am," said my father, rising to his feet, "may I ask what right you have to speak to me as if . . ."

"The right of one who for ten years has been a mother to your motherless child, sir, while you have neglected and forgotten her."

At that my father, whose bushy eyebrows were heavily contracted, turned to the Bishop.

"Bishop," he said, "is this what I've been paying my money for? Ten years' fees, and middling high ones too, I'm thinking?"

And then the Bishop, apparently hoping to make peace, said suavely:

"But aren't we crossing the river before we reach the bridge? The girl herself may have no such objections. . . . Have you?" he asked, turning to me.

I was trembling more than ever now, and at first I could not reply.

"Don't you wish to go back home with your father?"

"No, sir," I answered.

"And why not, please?"

"Because my father's home is no home to me—because my aunt has always been unkind to me, and because my father has never cared for me or protected me, and because . . ."

"Well, what else?"

"Because . . . because I wish to become a nun."

There was silence for a moment, and then my father broke into bitter laughter.

"So that's it, is it? I thought as much. You want to go into partnership with the Mother in the nun business, eh?"

"My mother wished me to become a nun, and I wish it myself, sir."

"Your mother was a baby—that's what she was."

"My mother was an angel, sir," I said, bridling up, "and when she was dying she hoped I should become a nun, and I can never become anything else under any circumstance."

"Bah!" said my father, with a contemptuous lift of the hand, and then turning to the Reverend Mother he said:

"Hark here, ma'am. There's an easy way and a hard way in most everything. I take the easy way first, and if it won't work I take the hard way next, and then it's stiff pulling for the people who pull against me. I came to Rome to take my daughter home. I don't feel called upon to explain why I want to take her home, or what I'm going to do with her when I get her there. I believe I've got the rights of a father to do what I mean to do, and that it will be an ugly business for anybody who aids and abets my daughter in resisting her father's will. So I'll leave her here a week longer, and when I come back, I'll expect her to be ready and waiting and willing—ready and waiting and willing, mind you—to go along with me."

After saying this my father faced about and with his heavy flat step went out of the room, whereupon the Bishop bowed to the Reverend Mother and followed him.

My heart was by this time in fierce rebellion—all that the pacifying life of the convent-school had done for me in ten years being suddenly swept away—and I cried:

"I won't do it! I won't do it!"

But I had seen that the Reverend Mother's face had suddenly become very white while my father spoke to her at the end and now she said, in a timid, almost frightened tone:

"Mary, we'll go out to Nemi to-day. I have something to say to you."

TWENTIETH CHAPTER

In the late afternoon of the same day we were sitting together for the last time on the terrace of the Reverend Mother's villa.

It was a peaceful evening, a sweet and holy time. Not a leaf was stirring, not a breath of wind was in the air; but the voice of a young boy, singing a love-song, came up from somewhere among the rocky ledges of the vineyards below, and while the bell of the monastic church behind us was ringing the Ave Maria, the far-off bell of the convent church at Gonzano was answering from the other side of the lake—like angels calling to each other from long distances in the sky.

"Mary," said the Reverend Mother, "I want to tell you a story. It is the story of my own life—mine and my sister's and my father's."

I was sitting by her side and she was holding my hand in her lap, and patting it, as she had done during the interview of the morning.

"They say the reason so few women become nuns is that a woman is too attached to her home to enter the holy life until she has suffered shipwreck in the world. That may be so with most women. It was not so with me.

"My father was what is called a self-made man. But his fortune did not content him. He wanted to found a family. If he had had a son this might have been easy. Having only two daughters, he saw no way but that of marrying one of us into the Italian nobility.

"My sister was the first to disappoint him. She fell in love with a young Roman musician. The first time the young man asked for my sister he was contemptuously refused; the second time he was insulted; the third time he was flung out of the house. His nature was headstrong and passionate, and so was my father's. If either had been different the result might not have been the same. Yet who knows? Who can say?"

The Reverend Mother paused for a moment. The boy's voice in the vineyard was going on.

"To remove my sister from the scene of temptation my father took her from Rome to our villa in the hills above Albano. But the young musician followed her. Since my father would not permit him to marry her he was determined that she should fly with him, and when she hesitated to do so he threatened her. If she did not meet him at a certain hour on a certain night my father would be dead in the morning."

The Reverend Mother paused again. The boy's voice had ceased; the daylight was dying out.

"My sister could not bring herself to sacrifice either her father or her lover. Hence she saw only one way left—to sacrifice herself."

"Herself?"

The Reverend Mother patted my hand. "Isn't that what women in tragic circumstances are always doing?" she said.

"By some excuse—I don't know what—she persuaded our father to change rooms with her that night—he going upstairs to her bedroom in the tower, and she to his on the ground floor at the back, opening on to the garden and the pine forest that goes up the hill.

"What happened after that nobody ever knew exactly. In the middle of the night the servants heard two pistol shots, and next morning my sister was found dead—shot to the heart through an open window as she lay in my father's bed.

"The authorities tried in vain to trace the criminal. Only one person had any idea of his identity. That was my father, and in his fierce anger he asked himself what he ought to do in order to punish the man who had killed his daughter.

"Then a strange thing happened. On the day before the funeral the young musician walked into my father's room. His face was white and wasted, and his eyes were red and swollen. He had come to ask if he might be allowed to be one of those to carry the coffin. My father consented. 'I'll leave him alone,' he thought. 'The man is punished enough.'

"All the people of Albano came to the funeral and there was not a dry eye as the cortège passed from our chapel to the grave. Everybody knew the story of my sister's hopeless love, but only two in the world knew the secret of her tragic death—her young lover, who was sobbing aloud as he staggered along with her body on his shoulder, and her old father, who was walking bareheaded and in silence, behind him."

My heart was beating audibly and the Reverend Mother stroked my hand to compose me—perhaps to compose herself also. It was now quite dark, the stars were coming out, and the bells of the two monasteries on opposite sides of the lake were ringing the first hour of night.

"That's my sister's story, Mary," said the Reverend Mother after a while, "and the moral of my own is the same, though the incidents are different.

"I was now my father's only child and all his remaining hopes centred in me. So he set himself to find a husband for me before the time came when I should form an attachment for myself. His choice fell on a middle-aged Roman noble of distinguished but impoverished family.

"'He has a great name; you will have a great fortune—what more do you want?' said my father.

"We were back in Rome by this time, and there—at school or elsewhere—I had formed the conviction that a girl must passionately love the man she marries, and I did not love the Roman noble. I had also been led to believe that a girl should be the first and only passion of the man who marries her, and, young as I was, I knew that my middle-aged lover had had other domestic relations.

"Consequently I demurred, but my father threatened and stormed, and then, remembering my sister's fate, I pretended to agree, and I was formally engaged.

"I never meant to keep my promise, and I began to think out schemes by which to escape from it. Only one way seemed open to me then, and cherishing the thought of it in secret, I waited and watched and made preparations for carrying out my purpose.

"At length the moment came to me. It was mid-Lent, and a masked ball was given by my fiancé's friends in one of the old Roman palaces. I can see it still—the great hall, ablaze with glowing frescoes, beautiful Venetian candelabras, gilded furniture, red and yellow damask and velvet, and then the throng of handsome men in many uniforms and beautiful women with rows of pearls falling from their naked throats.

"I had dressed myself as a Bacchante in a white tunic embroidered in gold, with bracelets on my bare arms, a tiger-skin band over my forehead, and a cluster of grapes in my hair.

"I danced every dance, I remember, most of them with my middle-aged lover, and I suppose no one seemed so gay and happy and heedless. At three o'clock in the morning I returned home in my father's carriage. At six I had entered a convent.

"Nobody in the outer world ever knew what had become of me, and neither did I know what happened at home after I left it. The rule of the convent was very strict. Sometimes, after morning prayers, the Superior would say, 'The mother of one of you is dead—pray for her soul,' and that was all we ever heard of the world outside.

"But nature is a mighty thing, my child, and after five years I became restless and unhappy. I began to have misgivings about my vocation, but the Mother, who was wise and human, saw what was going on in my heart. 'You are thinking about your father,' she said, 'that he is growing old, and needing a daughter to take care of him. Go out, and nurse him, and then come back to your cell and pray.'

"I went, but when I reached my father's house a great shock awaited me. A strange man was in the porter's lodge, and our beautiful palace was let out in apartments. My father was dead—three years dead and buried. After my disappearance he had shut himself up in his shame and grief, for, little as I had suspected it and hard and cruel as I had thought him, he had really and truly loved me. During his last days his mind had failed him and he had given away all his fortune—scattered it, no one knew how, as something that was quite useless—and then he died, alone and broken-hearted."

That was the end of the Reverend Mother's narrative. She did not try to explain or justify or condemn her own or her sister's conduct, neither did she attempt to apply the moral of her story to my own circumstances. She left me to do that for myself.

I had been spell-bound while she spoke, creeping closer and closer to her until my head was on her breast.

For some time longer we sat like this in the soft Italian night, while the fire-flies came out in clouds among the unseen flowers of the garden and the dark air seemed to be alive with sparks of light.

When the time came to go to bed the Reverend Mother took me to my room, and after some cheerful words she left me. But hardly had I lain down, shaken to the heart's core by what I had heard, and telling myself that the obedience of a daughter to her father, whatever he might demand of her, was an everlasting and irreversible duty, imposed by no human law-giver, and that marriage was a necessity, which was forced upon most women by a mysterious and unyielding law of God, when the door opened and the Reverend Mother, with a lamp in her hand, came in again.

"Mary," she said, "I forgot to tell you that I am leaving the Sacred Heart. The Sisters of my old convent have asked me to go back as Superior. I have obtained permission to do so and am going shortly, so that in any case we should have been parted soon. It is the Convent of . . ."

Here she gave me the name of a private society of cloistered nuns in the heart of Rome.

"I hope you will write to me as often as possible, and come to see me whenever you can. . . . And if it should ever occur that . . . but no, I will not think of that. Marriage is a sacred tie, too, and under proper conditions God blesses and hallows it."

With that she left me in the darkness. The church bell was ringing, the monks of the Passionist monastery were getting up for their midnight offices.

TWENTY-FIRST CHAPTER

A WEEK later I was living with my father in the Hotel Europa on the edge of the Piazza di Spagna.

He was kinder to me than he had ever been before, but he did not tell me what the plans were which he had formed for my future, and I was left to discover them for myself.

Our apartment was constantly visited by ecclesiastics—Monsignori, Archbishops, even one of the Cardinals of the Propaganda, brought there by Bishop Walsh (the Bishop of our own diocese), and I could not help but hear portions of their conversation.

"It will be difficult, extremely difficult," the Cardinal would say. "Such marriages are not encouraged by the Church, which holds that they are usually attended by the worst consequences to both wife and husband. Still—under the exceptional circumstances—that the bridegroom's family was Catholic before it was Protestant—it is possible, just possible . . ."

"Cardinal," my father would answer, while his strong face was darkening, "excuse me, sir, but I'm kind of curious to get the hang of this business. Either it can be done or it can't. If it can, we'll just sail in and do it. But if it can't, I believe I'll go home quick and spend my money another way."

Then there would be earnest assurances that in the end all would be right, only Rome moved slowly, and it would be necessary to have patience and wait.

My father waited three weeks, and meantime he occupied himself in seeing the sights of the old city.

But the mighty remains which are the luminous light-houses of the past—the Forum with the broken columns of its dead centuries; the Coliseum with its gigantic ruins, like the desolate crater of a moon; the Campagna with its hollow, crumbling tombs and shattered aqueducts,—only vexed and irritated him.

"Guess if I had my way," he said, "I would just clean out this old stone-yard of monuments to dead men, and make it more fit for living ones."

At length the Bishop came to say that the necessary business had been completed, and that to mark its satisfactory settlement the Pope had signified his willingness to receive in private audience both my father and myself.

This threw me into a state of the greatest nervousness, for I had begun to realise that my father's business concerned myself, so that when, early the following morning (clad according to instructions, my father in evening dress and I in a long black mantilla), we set out for the Vatican, I was in a condition of intense excitement.

What happened after we got out of the carriage at the bronze gate near St. Peter's I can only describe from a vague and feverish memory. I remember going up a great staircase, past soldiers in many-coloured coats, into a vast corridor, where there were other soldiers in other costumes. I remember going on and on, through salon after salon, each larger and more luxurious than the last, and occupied by guards still more gorgeously dressed than the guards we had left behind. I remember coming at length to a door at which a Chamberlain, wearing a sword, knelt and knocked softly, and upon its being opened announced our names. And then I remember that after all this grandeur as of a mediæval court I found myself in a plain room like a library with a simple white figure before me, and . . . I was in the presence of the Holy Father himself.

Can I ever forget that moment?

I had always been taught in the Convent to think of the Pope with a reverence only second to that which was due to the Saints, so at first I thought I should faint, and how I reached the Holy Father's feet I do not know. I only know that he was very sweet and kind to me, holding out the delicate white hand on which he wore the fisherman's emerald ring, and smoothing my head after I had kissed it.

When I recovered myself sufficiently to look up I saw that he was an old man, with a very pale and saintly face; and when he spoke it was in such a soft and fatherly voice that I loved and worshipped him.

"So this is the little lady," he said, "who is to be the instrument in the hands of Providence in bringing back an erring family into the folds of Mother Church."

Somebody answered him, and then he spoke to me about marriage, saying it was a holy state, instituted by the Almighty under a natural law and sanctioned by our divine Redeemer into the dignity of a Sacrament, so that those who entered it might live together in peace and love.

"It is a spiritual and sacred union, my child," he said, "a type of the holy mystery of Christ's relation to His Church."

Then he told me I was to make the best possible preparation for marriage in order to obtain the abundant graces of God, and to approach the altar only after penance and communion.

"And when you leave the church, my daughter," he said, "do not profane the day of your marriage by any sinful thought or act, but remember to bear yourself as if Jesus Christ Himself were with you, as He was at the marriage-feast in Cana of Galilee."

Then he warned me that when I entered into the solemn contract of holy matrimony I was to do so in the full consciousness that it could not be broken but by death.

"Whom God has joined together let no man put asunder—remember that, too, my daughter."

Finally he said something about children—that a Catholic marrying a person of another religion must not enter into any agreement whereby any of her children should be brought up in any other than the Catholic faith.

After that, and something said to my father which I cannot recall, he gave me his blessing, in words so beautiful and a voice so sweet that it fell on me like the soft breeze that comes out of the rising sun on a summer morning.

"May the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob be with you, my daughter. May your marriage be a yoke of love and peace, and may you see your children's children to the third and fourth generation."

Then he raised me to my feet, and at a touch from the Chamberlain, I backed out of the room.

When the door had closed on me I drew a deep breath, feeling as if I had come out of the Holy of Holies, and when I reached the Piazza of St. Peter's and came again upon the sight and sound of common things—the cabs and electric cars—it was the same as if I had suddenly descended from heaven to earth.

After my audience with the Pope, following on the Reverend Mother's story, all my objections to marriage had gone, and I wished to tell my father so, but an opportunity did not arise until late the same night and then it was he who was the first to speak.

Being in good spirits, after a dinner to the ecclesiastics, he said, as soon as his guests had gone—speaking in the tone of one who believed he was doing a great thing for me—

"Mary, matters are not quite settled yet, but you might as well know right here what we're trying to fix up for you."

Then he told me.

I was to marry the young Lord Raa!

I was stunned. It was just as if the power of thought had been smitten out of me.

TWENTY-SECOND CHAPTER

That night, and during the greater part of the following day, I felt, without quite knowing why, as if I were living under the dark cloud of a gathering thunderstorm. All my fear of the world, and my desire to escape from it, had fallen upon me afresh. Hence it was not altogether by the blind leading of fate that half an hour before Ave Maria I entered the church of the Convent which the Reverend Mother had given me the name of.

The church was empty when I pushed past the leather hanging that covered the door, but the sacristan was lighting the candles for Benediction, so I went up to the bronze screen, the Cancello, that divides the public part from the part occupied by the Sisters, and knelt on the nearest step.

After a while the church-bell rang overhead, and then (the congregation having gathered in the meantime) the nuns came in by way of a corridor which seemed to issue out of the darkness from under a figure of the Virgin and Child.

They were all in white, snow-white from head to foot, with a glimmer of blue scapular beneath their outer garment, and they wore long thick veils which entirely concealed their features when they entered but were raised when they reached their seats and faced the altar.

Familiar as I was with similar scenes this one moved me as I had never before been moved—the silent white figures, with hands clasped on their breasts, coming in one by one with noiseless and unhurried footsteps, like a line of wraiths from another world.

But a still deeper emotion was to come to me.

As the last of the nuns entered, the Superior as I knew she would be, I recognised her instantly. It was my own Reverend Mother herself; and when, after kneeling to the altar, she came down to her seat nearest to the screen, immediately in front of the place where I knelt, I knew by the tremor of the clasped hands which held the rosary, that she had seen and recognised me.

I trembled and my heart thumped against my breast.

Then the priest entered and the Litany began. It was sung throughout. Almost the whole of the service was sung. Never had Benediction seemed so beautiful, so pathetic, so appealing, so irresistible.

By the time the *Tantum ergo* had been reached and the sweet female voices, over the soft swell of the organ, were rising to the vaulted roof in sorrowful reparation for the sins of all sinners in the world who did not pray for themselves, the religious life was calling to me as it had never called before.

"Come away from the world," it seemed to say. "Obedience to your heavenly Father cancels all duty to your earthly one. Leave everything you fear behind you, and find peace and light and love."

The service was over, the nuns had dropped their veils and gone out as slowly and noiselessly as they had come in (the last of them with her head down): the sacristan with his long rod was extinguishing the candles on the altar; the church was growing dark and a lay-sister in black was rattling a bunch of keys at the door behind me before I moved from my place beside the rails.

Then I awoke as from a dream, and looking longingly back at the dark corridor down which the nuns had disappeared, I was turning to go when I became aware that a young man was standing beside me and smiling into my face.

"Mally," he said very softly, and he held out his hand.

Something in the voice made me giddy, something in the blue eyes made me tremble. I looked at him but did not speak.

"Don't you know me, Mally?" he said.

I felt as if a rosy veil were falling over my face and neck. A flood of joy was sweeping through me. At last I knew who it was.

It was Martin Conrad, grown to be a man, a tall, powerful, manly man, but with the same face still—an elusive ghost of the boy's face I used to look up to and love.

A few minutes later we were out on the piazza in front of the church, and with a nervous rush of joyous words he was telling me what had brought him to Rome.

Having just "scraped through" his examinations, and taken his degree—couldn't have done so if the examiners had not been "jolly good" to him—he had heard that Lieut. . . . —was going down to the great ice barrier that bounds the South Pole, to investigate the sources of winds and tides, so he had offered himself as doctor to the expedition and been accepted.

Sailing from the Thames ten days ago they had put into Naples that morning for coal, and taking advantage of the opportunity he had run up to Rome, remembering that I was at school here, but never expecting to see me, and coming upon me by the merest accident in the world—something having said to him, "Let's go in here and look at this queer old church."

He had to leave to-morrow at two, though, having to sail the same night, but of course it would be luck to go farther south than Charcot and make another attack on the Antarctic night.

I could see that life was full of faith and hope and all good things for him, and remembering some episodes of the past I said:

"So you are going 'asploring' in earnest at last?"

"At last," he answered, and we looked into each other's eyes and laughed as we stood together on the church steps, with little tender waves of feeling from our childhood sweeping to our feet.

"And you?" he said. "You look just the same. I knew you instantly. Yet you are changed too. So grown and so . . . so wonderfully . . ."

I knew what he meant to say, and being too much of a child to pretend not to know, and too much of a woman (notwithstanding my nun-like impulses) not to find joy in it, I said I was glad.

"You've left the Convent, I see. When did that happen?"

I told him three weeks ago—that my father had come for me and we were going back to Ellan.

"And then? What are you going to do then?" he asked.

For a moment I felt ashamed to answer, but at last I told him that I was going home to be married.

"Married? When? To whom?"

I said I did not know when, but it was to be to the young Lord Raa.

"Raa? Did you say Raa? That . . . Good G——But surely you know . . ."

He did not finish what he was going to say, so I told him I did not know anything, not having seen Lord Raa since I came to school, and everything having been arranged for me by my father.

"Not seen him since . . . everything arranged by your father?"

"Yes."

Then he asked me abruptly where I was staying, and when I told him he said he would walk back with me to the hotel.

His manner had suddenly changed, and several times as we walked together up the Tritoni and along the Du Marcelli he began to say something and then stopped.

"Surely your father knows . . ."

"If he does, I cannot possibly understand . . ."

I did not pay as much attention to his broken exclamations as I should have done but for the surprise and confusion of coming so suddenly upon him again; and when, as we reached the hotel, he said:

"I wonder if your father will allow me to speak. . . ."

"I'm sure he'll be delighted," I said, and then, in my great impatience, I ran upstairs ahead of him and burst into my father's room, crying:

"Father, whom do you think I have brought to see you—look!"

To my concern and discomfiture my father's reception of Martin was very cool, and at first he did not even seem to know him.

"You don't remember me, sir?" said Martin.

"I'm afraid I can't just place you," said my father.

After I had made them known to each other they sat talking about the South Pole expedition, but it was a chill and cheerless interview, and after a few minutes Martin rose to go.

"I find it kind of hard to figure you fellows out," said my father. "No money that I know of has ever been made in the Unknown, as you call it, and if you discover both Poles I don't just see how they're to be worth a two-cent stamp to you. But you know best, so good-bye and good luck to you!"

I went out to the lift with Martin, who asked if he could take me for a walk in the morning. I answered yes, and inquired what hour he would call for me.

"Twelve o'clock," he replied, and I said that would suit me exactly.

The Bishop came to dine with us that night, and after dinner, when I had gone to the window to look out over the city for the three lights on the Loggia of the Vatican, he and my father talked together for a long time in a low tone.

They were still talking when I left them to go to bed.

TWENTY-THIRD CHAPTER

At breakfast next morning my father told me that something unexpected had occurred to require that we should return home immediately, and therefore he had sent over to Cook's for seats by the noon express.

I was deeply disappointed, but I knew my father too well to demur, so I slipped away to my room and sent a letter to Martin, explaining the change in our plans and saying good-bye to him.

When we reached the station, however, I found Martin waiting on the platform in front of the compartment that was labelled with our name.

I thought my father was even more brusque with him than before, and the Bishop, who was to travel with us, was curt almost to rudeness. But Martin did not seem to mind that this morning, for his lower lip had the stiff setting which I had seen in it when he was a boy, and after I stepped into the carriage he stepped in after me, leaving the two men on the platform.

"Shall you be long away?" I asked.

"Too long unfortunately. Six months, nine—perhaps twelve, worse luck! Wish I hadn't to go at all," he answered.

I was surprised and asked why, whereupon he stammered some excuse, and then said abruptly:

"I suppose you'll not be married for some time at all events?"

I told him I did not know, everything depending on my father.

"Anyhow, you'll see and hear for yourself when you reach home, and then perhaps you'll . . ."

I answered that I should have to do what my father desired, being a girl, and therefore . . .

"But surely a girl has some rights of her own," he said, and then I was silent and a little ashamed, having a sense of female helplessness which I had never felt before and could find no words for.

"I'll write to your father," he said, and just at that moment the bell rang, and my father came into the compartment, saying:

"Now then, young man, if you don't want to be taken up to the North Pole instead of going down to the South one . . ."

"That's all right, sir. Don't you trouble about *me*. I can take care of myself," said Martin.

Something in his tone must have said more than his words to my father and the Bishop, for I saw that they looked at each other with surprise.

Then the bell rang again, the engine throbbed, and Martin said, "Good-bye! Good-bye!"

While the train moved out of the station he stood bareheaded on the platform with such a woebegone face that looking back at him my throat began to hurt me as it used to do when I was a child.

I was very sad that day as we travelled north. My adopted country had become dear to me during my ten years' exile from home, and I thought I was seeing the last of my beautiful Italy, crowned with sunshine and decked with flowers.

But there was another cause of my sadness, and that was the thought of Martin's uneasiness about my marriage and the feeling that if he had anything to say to my father he ought to have said it then.

And there was yet another cause of which I was quite unconscious—that like every other girl before love dawns on her, half of my nature was still asleep, the half that makes life lovely and the world dear.

To think that Martin Conrad was the one person who could have wakened my sleeping heart! That a word, a look, a smile from him that day could have changed the whole current of my life, and that . . .

But no, I will not reproach him. Have I not known since the day on St. Mary's Rock that above all else he is a born gentleman?

And yet . . . And yet . . .

MEMORANDUM BY MARTIN CONRAD

AND yet I was a fool, or in spite of everything I should have spoken to Daniel O'Neill before he left Rome. I should have said to him:

"Do you know that the man to whom you are going to marry your daughter is a profligate and a reprobate? If you *do* know this, are you deliberately selling her, body and soul, to gratify your lust of rank and power and all the rest of your rotten aspirations?"

That is what I ought to have done, but didn't do. I was afraid of being thought to have personal motives—of interfering where I wasn't wanted, of butting in when I had no right.

Yet I felt I *had* a right, and I had half a mind to throw up everything and go back to Ellan. But the expedition was the big chance I had been looking forward to and I could not give it up.

So I resolved to write. But writing isn't exactly my job, and it took me a fortnight to get anything done to my satisfaction. By that time we were at Port Said, and from there I posted three letters,—the first to Daniel O'Neill, the second to Bishop Walsh, the third to Father Dan.

Would they reach in time? If so, would they be read and considered or resented and destroyed?

I did not know. I could not guess. And then I was going down into the deep Antarctic night, where no sound from the living world could reach me.

What would happen before I could get back? Only God could say. M. C.

SECOND PART

MY MARRIAGE

TWENTY-FOURTH CHAPTER

NOTWITHSTANDING my father's anxiety to leave Rome we travelled slowly and it was a week before we reached Ellan. By that time my depression had disappeared, and I was quivering with mingled curiosity and fear at the thought of meeting the man who was to be my husband.

My father, for reasons of his own, was equally excited, and as we sailed into the bay at Blackwater he pointed out the developments which had been made under his direction—the hotels, theatres, dancing palaces and boarding houses that lined the sea-front, and the electric railways that ran up to the tops of the mountains.

"See that?" he cried. "I told them I could make this old island hum."

On a great stone pier that stood deep into the bay, a crowd of people were waiting for the arrival of the steamer.

"That's nothing," said my father. "Nothing to what you see at the height of the season."

As soon as we had drawn up alongside the pier, and before the passengers had landed, four gentlemen came aboard, and my heart thumped with the thought that my intended husband would be one of them; but he was not, and the first words spoken to my father were—

"His lordship's apologies, sir. He has an engagement to-day, but hopes to see you at your own house to-morrow morning."

I recognised the speaker as the guardian (grown greyer and even less prepossessing) who had crossed with the young Lord Raa when he was going up to Oxford; and his companions were a smooth-faced man with searching eyes who was introduced as his lordship's solicitor from London, a Mr. Curphy, whom I knew to be my father's advocate, and my dear old Father Dan.

I was surprised to find Father Dan a smaller man than I had thought him, very plain and provincial, a little country parish priest, but he had the tender smile I always remembered, and the sweet Irish roll of the vowels that I could never forget.

"God bless you," he said. "How well you're looking! And how like your mother, Lord rest her soul! I knew the Blessed Virgin would take care of you, and she has, she has."

Three conveyances were waiting for us—a grand brougham for the Bishop, a big motor car for the guardian and the London lawyer, and a still bigger one for ourselves.

"Well, s'long until to-morrow then," cried my father, getting up into the front row of his own car, with the advocate beside him and Father Dan and myself behind.

On the way home Father Dan talked of the business that had brought me back, saying I was not to think too much of anything he might have said of Lord Raa in his letters, seeing that he had spoken from hearsay, and the world was so censorious—and then there was no measuring the miraculous influence that might be exercised by a good woman.

He said this with a certain constraint, and was more at ease when he spoke of the joy that ought to come into a girl's life at her marriage—her first love, her first love-letter, her wedding-day and her first baby, all the sweet and wonderful things of a new existence which a man could never know.

"Even an old priest may see that," he said, with a laugh and a pat of my hand.

We dropped Mr. Curphy at his house in Holmtown, and then my father sat with us at the back, and talked with tremendous energy of what he had done, of what he was going to do, and of all the splendours that were before me.

"You'll be the big woman of the island, gel, and there won't be a mother's son that dare say boo to you."

I noticed that, in his excitement, his tongue, dropping the suggestion of his adopted country, reverted to the racy speech of his native soil; and I had a sense of being with him before I was born, when he returned home from America with millions of dollars at his back, and the people who had made game of his father went down before his face like a flood.

Such of them as had not done so then (being of the "aristocracy" of the island and remembering the humble stock he came from) were to do so now, for in the second generation, and by means of his daughter's marriage, he was going to triumph over them all.

"We'll beat 'em, gel! My gough, yes, we'll beat 'em!"

he cried, with a flash of his black eyes and a masterful lift of his eyebrows.

As we ran by the mansions of the great people of Ellan, he pointed them out to me with a fling of the arm and spoke of the families in a tone of contempt.

"See that? That's Christian of Balla-Christian. The man snubbed me six months ago. He'll know better six months to come. . . . That's Eyreton. His missus was too big to call on your mother—she'll call on you, though, you go bail. See yonder big tower in the trees? That's Folksdale, where the Farragans live. The daughters have been walking over the world like peacocks, but they'll crawl on it like cockroaches. . . . Hulloh, here's ould Balgean of Eagle Hill, in his grand carriage with his English coachman. . . . See that, though? See him doff his hat to you, the ould hypocrite? He knows something. He's got an inkling. Things travel. We'll beat 'em, gel, we'll beat 'em! They'll be round us like bees about a honeypot."

It was impossible not to catch the contagion of my father's triumphant spirits, and in my different way I found myself tingling with delight as I recognised the scenes associated with my childhood—the village, the bridge, the lane to Sunny Lodge and Murphy's Mouth, and the trees that bordered our drive.

Nearly everything looked smaller or narrower or lower than I had thought, but I had forgotten how lovely they all were, lying so snugly under the hill and with the sea in front of them.

Our house alone when we drove up to it seemed larger than I had expected, but my father explained this by saying:

"Improvements, gel! I'll show you over them to-morrow morning."

Aunt Bridget (white-headed now and wearing spectacles and a white cap), Betsy Beauty (grown tall and round, with a kind of country comeliness) and Nessy MacLeod (looking like a premature old maid who was doing her best to be a girl) were waiting at the open porch when our car drew up, and they received me with surprising cordiality.

"Here she is at last!" said Aunt Bridget.

"And such luck as she has come home to!" said Betsy Beauty.

There were compliments on the improvement in my appearance (Aunt Bridget declaring she could not have believed it, she really could not), and then Nessy undertook to take me to my room.

"It's the same room still, Mary," said my Aunt, calling to me as I went upstairs. "When they were changing everything else I remembered your poor dear mother and wouldn't hear of their changing that. It isn't a bit altered."

It was not. Everything was exactly as I remembered it. But just as I was beginning for the first time in my life to feel grateful to Aunt Bridget, Nessy said:

"No thanks to her, though. If she'd had her way, she would have wiped out every trace of your mother, and arranged this marriage for her own daughter instead."

More of the same kind she said which left me with the impression that my father was now the god of her idolatry, and that my return was not too welcome to my aunt and cousin; but as soon as she was gone, and I was left alone, home began to speak to me in soft and entrancing whispers.

How my pulses beat, how my nerves tingled! Home! Home! Home!

From that dear spot everything seemed to be the same, and everything had something to say to me. What sweet and tender and touching memories!

Here was the big black four-post bed, with the rosary hanging at its head; and here was the praying-stool with the figure of Our Lady on the wall above it.

I threw up the window, and there was the salt breath of the sea in the crisp island air; there was the sea itself glistening in the afternoon sunshine; there was St. Mary's Rock draped in its garment of sea-weed, and there were the clouds of white sea-gulls whirling about it.

Taking off my hat and coat I stepped downstairs and out of the house—going first into the farm-yard where the springless carts were still clattering over the cobble-stones; then into the cow-house, where the milkmaids were still sitting on low stools with their heads against the sides of the slow-eyed Brownies, and the milk rattling in their noisy pails; then into the farm-kitchen, where the air was full of the odour of burning turf and the still sweeter smell of cakes baking on a griddle; and finally into the potting-shed in the garden, where Tommy the Mate (more than ever like a weather-beaten old salt) was still working as before.

The old man looked round with his "starboard eye," and recognised me instantly.

"God bless my sowl," he cried, "if it isn't the l'l' missy! Well, well! Well, well! And she's a woman grown! A real lady too! My gracious, yes," he said, after a second and longer look, "and there hasn't been the match of her on this island since they laid her mother under the sod!"

I wanted to ask him a hundred questions, but Aunt Bridget, who had been watching from a window, called from the house to say she was "mashing" a cup of tea for me, so I returned to the drawing-room where (my father being busy with his letters in the library) Betsy Beauty talked for half an hour about Lord Raa, his good looks, distinguished manners and general accomplishments.

"But aren't you just dying to see him?" she said.

I saw him the following morning.

TWENTY-FIFTH CHAPTER

I WAS sitting in my own room, writing to the Reverend Mother, to tell her of my return home, when I heard the toot of a horn and raising my eyes saw a motor car coming up the drive. It contained three gentlemen, one of them wore goggles and carried a silver-haired terrier on his knees.

A little later Nessy MacLeod came to tell me that Lord Raa and his party had arrived and I was wanted immediately.

I went downstairs hesitatingly, with a haunting sense of coming trouble. Reaching the door of the drawing-room I saw my intended husband for the first time—there being nothing in his appearance to awaken in me the memory of ever having seen him before.

He was on the hearthrug in front of the fire, talking to Betsy Beauty, who was laughing immoderately. To get a better look at him, and at the same time to compose myself, I stopped for a moment to speak to the three gentlemen (the two lawyers and Lord Raa's trustee or guardian) who were standing with my father in the middle of the floor.

He was undoubtedly well-dressed and had a certain air of breeding, but even to my girlish eyes he betrayed at that first sight the character of a man who had lived an irregular, perhaps a dissipated life.

His face was pale, almost puffy, his grey eyes were slow and heavy, his moustache was dark and small, his hair was thin over his forehead, and he had a general appearance of being much older than his years, which I knew to be thirty-three.

His manners, when I approached him, were courteous and gentle, almost playful and indulgent, but through all their softness there pierced a certain hardness, not to say brutality, which I afterwards learned (when life had had its tug at me) to associate with a man who has spent much of his time among women of loose character.

Betsy Beauty made a great matter of introducing us; but in a drawling voice, and with a certain play of humour, he told her it was quite unnecessary, since we were very old friends, having made each other's acquaintance as far back as ten years ago, when I was the prettiest little woman in the world, he remembered, though perhaps my manners were not quite cordial.

"We had a slight difference on the subject of kisses. Don't you remember it?"

Happily there was no necessity to reply, for my father came to say that he wished to show his lordship the improvements he had been making, and the rest of us were at liberty to follow them.

The improvements consisted chiefly of a new wing to the old house, containing a dining room, still unfurnished, which had been modelled, as I found later, on the corresponding room in Castle Raa.

With a proud lift of his white head my father pointed out the beauties of his new possession, while my intended husband, with his monocle to his eye, looked on with a certain condescension, and answered with a languid humour that narrowly bordered on contempt.

"Oak, sir, solid oak," said my father, rapping with his knuckles on the tall, dark, heavy wainscoting.

"As old as our hearts and as hard as our heads, I suppose," said Lord Raa.

"Harder than some, sir," said my father.

"Exactly," said Lord Raa in his slow drawl, and then there was general laughter.

The bell rang for luncheon, and we went into the plain old dining room, where Aunt Bridget placed her principal guest on her right and told him all about her late husband, the Colonel, his honours and military achievements.

I could see that Lord Raa was soon very weary of this, and more than once, sitting by his side, I caught the cynical and rather supercilious responses to which, under the gloss of his gracious manners, Aunt Bridget seemed quite oblivious.

I was so nervous and embarrassed that I spoke very little during luncheon, and even Aunt Bridget observed this at last.

"Mary, dear, why don't you speak?" she said.

But without waiting for my reply she proceeded to explain to his lordship that the strangest change had come over me since I was a child, when I had been the sauciest little chatterbox in the world, whereas now I was so shy that it was nearly impossible to get a word out of me.

"Hope I shall be able to get one word out of her, at least," said his lordship, whereupon Aunt Bridget smiled significantly and Betsy Beauty burst into fits of laughter.

Almost before the meal was over, my father rose from his seat at the head of the table, and indicating the lawyers who sat near to him, he said:

"These gentlemen and I have business to fix up—money matters and all that—so I guess we'll step into the library and leave you young people to look after yourselves."

Everybody rose to leave the room.

"All back for tea-time," said Aunt Bridget.

"Of course you don't want *me,*" said Betsy Beauty with a giggle, and at the next moment I was alone with his lordship, who drew a long breath that was almost like a yawn, and said:

"Is there no quiet place we can slip away to?"

There was the glen at the back of the house (the Cape Flora of Martin Conrad), so I took him into that, not without an increasing sense of embarrassment. It was a clear October day, the glen was dry, and the air under the shadow of the thinning trees was full of the soft light of the late autumn.

"Ah, this is better," said his lordship.

He lit a cigar and walked for some time by my side without speaking, merely flicking the seeding heads off the dying thistles with his walking stick, and then ruckling it through the withered leaves with which the path was strewn.

But half way up the glen he began to look aslant at me through his monocle, and then to talk about my life in Rome, wondering how I could have been content to stay so long at the Convent, and hinting at a rumour which had reached him that I had actually wished to stay there altogether.

"Extraordinary! 'Pon my word, extraordinary! It's well enough for women who have suffered shipwreck in their lives to live in such places, but for a young gal with any fortune, any looks . . . why I wonder she doesn't die of *ennui.*"

I was still too nervous and embarrassed to make much protest, so he went on to tell me with what difficulty he supported the boredom of his own life even in London, with its clubs, its race-meetings, its dances, its theatres and music halls, and the amusement to be got out of some of the ladies of society, not to speak of certain well-known professional beauties.

One of his great friends—his name was Eastcliff—was going to marry the most famous of the latter class (a foreign dancer at the "Empire"), and since he was rich and could afford to please himself, why shouldn't he?

When we reached the waterfall at the top of the glen (it had been the North Cape of Martin Conrad), we sat on a rustic seat which stands there, and then, to my still deeper embarrassment, his lordship's conversation came to close quarters.

Throwing away his cigar and taking his silver-haired terrier on his lap he said:

"Of course you know what the business is which the gentlemen are discussing in the library?"

As well as I could for the nervousness that was stifling me, I answered that I knew.

He stroked the dog with one hand, prodded his stick into the gravel with the other, and said:

"Well, I don't know what your views about marriage are. Mine, I may say, are liberal."

I listened without attempting to reply.

"I think nine-tenths of the trouble that attends married life—the breakdowns and what not—come of an irrational effort to tighten the marriage knot."

Still I said nothing.

"To imagine that two independent human beings can be tied together like a couple of Siamese twins, neither to move without the other, living precisely the same life, year in, year out . . . why, it's silly, positively silly."

In my ignorance I could find nothing to say, and after another moment my intended husband swished the loosened gravel with his stick and said:

"I believe in married people leaving each other free—each going his and her own way—what do you think?"

I must have stammered some kind of answer—I don't know what—for I remember that he said next:

"Quite so, that's my view of matrimony, and I'm glad to see you appear to share it. . . . Tell the truth, I was afraid you wouldn't," he added, with something more about the nuns and the convent.

I wanted to say that I didn't, but my nervousness was increasing every moment, and before I could find words in which to protest he was speaking to me again.

"Our friends in the library seem to think that you and I could get along together, and I'm disposed to think they're right—aren't you?"

In my ignorance and helplessness, and with the consciousness of what I was expected to do, I merely looked at him without speaking.

Then he fixed his monocle afresh, and, looking back at me in a curious way, he said:

"I don't think I should bore you, my dear. In fact, I should be rather proud of having a good-looking woman for my wife, and I fancy I could give you a good time. In any case"—this with a certain condescension—"my *name* might be of some use to you."

A sort of shame was creeping over me. The dog was yawning in my face. My intended husband threw it off his knee.

"Shall we consider it a settled thing, then?" he asked, and when in my confusion I still made no reply (having nothing which I felt myself entitled to say), he said something about Aunt Bridget and what she had told him at luncheon about my silence and shyness, and then rising to his feet he put my arm through his own, and turned our faces towards home.

That was all. As I am a truthful woman, that was everything. Not a word from me, nay, not half a word, merely a passive act of silent acquiescence, and in my youthful and almost criminal innocence I was committed to the most momentous incident of my life.

But if there was no love-making, no fondling, no kissing, no courtship of any kind, and none of the delirious rapture which used to be described in Alma's novels, I was really grateful for that, and immensely relieved to find that matters could be completed without them.

When we reached the house, the bell was ringing for tea, and my father was coming out of the library, followed by the lawyers.

"So that's all right, gentlemen?" he was saying.

"Yes, that's all right, sir," they were answering; and then, seeing us as we entered, my father said to Lord Raa:

"And what about you two?"

"We're all right also," said his lordship in his drawling voice.

"Good!" said my father, and he slapped his lordship sharply on the back, to his surprise, and I think, discomfiture.

Then with a cackle of light laughter among the men, we all trooped into the drawing room.

Aunt Bridget in her gold-rimmed spectacles and new white cap, poured out the tea from our best silver tea-pot, while Nessy MacLeod with a geranium in her red hair, and Betsy Beauty, with large red roses in her bosom, handed round the cups. After a moment, my father, with a radiant face, standing back to the fire, said in a loud voice:

"Friends all, I have something to tell you."

Everybody except myself looked up and listened, though everybody knew what was coming.

"We've had a stiff tussle in the library this afternoon, but everything is settled satisfactory—and the marriage is as good as made."

There was a chorus of congratulations for me, and a few for his lordship, and then my father said again:

"Of course there'll be deeds to draw up, and I want things done correct, even if it costs me a bit of money. But we've only one thing more to fix up to-day, and then we're through—the wedding. When is it to come off?"

An appeal was made to me, but I felt it was only formal, so I glanced across to Lord Raa without speaking.

"Come now," said my father, looking from one to the other. "The clean cut is the short cut, you know, and when I'm sot on doing a thing, I can't take rest till it's done. What do you say to this day next month?"

I bowed and my intended husband, in his languid way, said:

"Agreed!"

A few minutes afterwards the motor was ordered round, and the gentlemen prepared to go. Then the silver-haired terrier was missed, and for the first time that day his lordship betrayed a vivid interest, telling us its price and pedigree and how much he would give rather than lose it. But at the last moment Tommy appeared with the dog in his arms and dropped it into the car, whereupon my intended husband thanked him effusively.

"Yes," said Tommy, "I thought you set store by *that,* sir."

At the next moment the car was gone.

"Well, you *are* a lucky girl," said Betsy Beauty; and Aunt Bridget began to take credit to herself for all that had come to pass, and to indicate the methods by which she meant to manage Castle Raa as soon as ever I became mistress of it.

Thus in my youth, my helplessness, my ignorance, and my inexperience I became engaged to the man who had been found and courted for me. If I acquiesced, I had certainly not been consulted. My father had not consulted me. My intended husband had not consulted me. Nobody consulted me. I am not even sure that I thought anybody was under any obligation to consult me. Love had not spoken to me, sex was still asleep in me, and my marriage was arranged before my deeper nature knew what was being done.

TWENTY-SIXTH CHAPTER

THE next weeks were full of hurry, hubbub and perturbation. Our house was turned upside down. Milliners, sewing-maids and dressmakers were working day and night. Flowers, feathers and silk remnants were flowing like sea-wrack into every room. Orders were given, orders were retracted and given again, and then again retracted.

Such flying up and down stairs! Everybody so breathless! Everybody so happy! Every face wearing a smile! Every tongue rippling with laughter! The big grey mansion which used to seem so chill and cold felt for the first time like a house of joy.

In the midst of these busy preparations I had no time to think. My senses were excited. I was dazed, stunned, wrapped round by a kind of warm air of hot-house happiness, and this condition of moral intoxication increased as the passing of the days brought fresh developments.

Our neighbours began to visit us. My father had been right about the great people of the island. Though they had stood off so long, they found their account in my good fortune, and as soon as my marriage was announced they came in troops to offer their congratulations

Never, according to Tommy the Mate, had the gravel of our carriage drive been so rucked up by the pawing feet of high-bred horses. But their owners were no less restless. It was almost pitiful to see their shamefacedness as they entered our house for the first time, and to watch the shifts they were put to in order to account for the fact that they had never been there before.

Aunt Bridget's vanity was too much uplifted by their presence to be particular about their excuses, but my father's contempt of their subterfuges was naked and undisguised, and I hardly know whether to feel amused or ashamed when I think of how he scored off them, how he lashed them to the bone, with what irony and sarcasm he scorched their time-serving little souls.

When they were very great folks, the "aristocracy" of Ellan, he pretended not to know who they were, and asked their names, their father's names, and what parishes they came from.

"Some of the Christians of Balla-Christian, are you? Think of that now! And me a born Ellanman, and not knowing you from Adam!"

When they were very near neighbours, with lands that made boundary with our own, he pretended to think they had been twenty years abroad, or perhaps sick, or even dead and buried.

"Too bad, ma'am, too bad," he would say. "And me thinking you were under the sod through all the lonely years my poor wife was ill and dying."

But when they were insular officials, who "walked on the stars," and sometimes snubbed him in public, the rapier of ridicule was too light for his heavy hand, and he took up the sledge-hammer, telling them he was the same man to-day as yesterday, and only his circumstances were different—his daughter being about to become the lady of the first house in the island, and none of them being big enough to be left out of it.

After such scenes Aunt Bridget, for all her despotism within her own doors, used to tremble with dread of our neighbours taking lasting offence, but my father would say:

"Chut, woman, they'll come again, and make no more faces about it."

They did, and if they were shy of my father they were gracious enough to me, saying it was such a good thing for society in the island that Castle Raa was to have a lady, a real lady, at the head of it at last.

Then came their wedding presents—pictures, books, silver ornaments, gold ornaments, clocks, watches, chains, jewellery, until my bedroom was blocked up with them. As each fresh parcel arrived there would be a rush of all the female members of our household to open it, after which Betsy Beauty would say:

"What a lucky girl you are!"

I began to think I was. I found it impossible to remain unaffected by the whirlwind of joyous turmoil in which I lived. The refulgence of the present hour wiped out the past, which seemed to fade away altogether. After the first few days I was flying about from place to place, and wherever I went I was a subject for congratulation and envy.

If there were moments of misgiving, when, like the cold wind out of a tunnel, there came the memory of the Reverend Mother and the story she had told me at Nemi, there were other moments when I felt quite sure that, in marrying Lord Raa, I should be doing a self-sacrificing thing and a kind of solemn duty.

One such moment was when Mr. Curphy, my father's advocate, who with his clammy hands always made me think of an over-fatted fish, came to tell him that, after serious legal difficulties, the civil documents had been agreed to, for, after he had finished with my father, he drew me aside and said, as he smoothed his long brown beard:

"You ought to be a happy girl, Mary. I suppose you know what you are doing for your father? You are wiping out the greatest disappointment of his life, and rectifying the cruelty—the inevitable cruelty—of the law, when you were born a daughter after he had expected a son."

Another such moment was when the Bishop came, in his grand carriage, to say that after much discussion he had persuaded his lordship to sign the necessary declaration that all the children of our union, irrespective of sex, should be brought up as Catholics, for taking me aside, as the advocate had done the day before, he said, in his suave voice, fingering his jewelled cross:

"I congratulate you, my child. Yours is a great and precious privilege—the privilege of bringing back to the

Church a family which has been estranged from it for nineteen years."

At the end of a fortnight we signed the marriage settlement. The little ceremony took place in the drawing-room of my father's house. My intended husband, who had not been to see me in the meantime, brought with him (as well as his trustee and lawyer) a lady and a gentleman.

The lady was his maiden aunt, Lady Margaret Anslem, a fair woman of about forty, fashionably dressed, redolent of perfume, and (except to me, to whom she talked quite amicably) rather reserved and haughty, as if the marriage of her nephew into our family were a bitter pill which she had compelled herself to swallow.

The gentleman was a tall young man wearing a very high collar and cravat, and using a handkerchief with embroidered initials in the corner of it. He turned out to be the Hon. Edward Eastcliff—the great friend who, being rich enough to please himself, was about to marry the professional beauty.

I noticed that Aunt Bridget, with something of the instinct of the fly about the flame, immediately fixed herself upon the one, and that Betsy Beauty attached herself to the other.

Lord Raa himself looked as tired as before, and for the first half-hour he behaved as if he did not quite know what to do with himself for wretchedness and *ennui*.

Then the deeds were opened and spread out on a table, and though the gentlemen seemed to be trying not to discuss the contents aloud I could not help hearing some of the arrangements that had been made for the payment of my intended husband's debts, and certain details of his annual allowance.

Looking back upon that ugly hour, I wonder why, under the circumstances, I should have been so wounded, but I remember that a sense of discomfort amounting to shame came upon me at sight of the sorry bargaining. It seemed to have so little to do with the spiritual union of souls, which I had been taught to think marriage should be. But I had no time to think more about that before my father, who had signed the documents himself in his large, heavy hand, was saying:

"Now, gel, come along, we're waiting for your signature."

I cannot remember that I read anything. I cannot remember that anything was read to me. I was told where to sign, and I signed, thinking what must be must be, and that was all I had to do with the matter.

I was feeling a little sick, nevertheless, and standing by the fire with one foot on the fender, when Lord Raa came up to me at the end, and said in his drawling voice:

"So it's done."

"Yes, it's done," I answered.

After a moment he talked of where we were to live, saying we must of course pass most of our time in London.

"But have you any choice about the honeymoon," he said, "where we should spend it, I mean?"

I answered that he would know best, but when he insisted on my choosing, saying it was my right to do so, I remembered that during my time in the Convent the one country in the world I had most desired to see was the Holy Land.

Never as long as I live shall I forget the look in his lordship's grey eyes when I gave this as my selection.

"You mean Jerusalem—Nazareth—the Dead Sea and all that?" he asked.

I felt my face growing red as at a frightful *faux pas,* but his lordship only laughed, called me his "little nun," and said that since I had been willing to leave the choice to him he would suggest Egypt and Italy, and Berlin and Paris on the way back, with the condition that we left Ellan for London on the day of our marriage.

After the party from Castle Raa had gone, leaving some of their family lace and pearls behind for the bride to wear at her wedding, and after Aunt Bridget had hoped that "that woman" (meaning Lady Margaret) didn't intend to live at the Castle after my marriage, because such a thing would not fit in with her plans "at all, at all," I mentioned the arrangements for the honeymoon, whereupon Betsy Beauty, to whom Italy was paradise, and London glimmered in an atmosphere of vermillion and gold, cried out as usual:

"What a lucky, lucky girl you are!"

But the excitement which had hitherto buoyed me up was partly dispelled by this time, and I was beginning to feel some doubt of it.

TWENTY-SEVENTH CHAPTER

As my wedding-day approached and time ran short, the air of joy which had pervaded our house was driven out by an atmosphere of irritation. We were all living on our nerves. The smiles that used to be at everybody's service gave place to frowns, and, in Aunt Bridget's case, to angry words which were distributed on all sides and on all occasions.

As a consequence I took refuge in my room, and sat long hours there in my dressing-gown and slippers, hearing the hubbub that was going on in the rest of the house, but taking as little part in it as possible. In this semi-conventual silence and solitude, the excitement which had swept me along for three weeks subsided rapidly.

I began to think, and above all to feel, and the one thing I felt beyond everything else was a sense of something wanting.

I remembered the beautiful words of the Pope about marriage as a mystic relation, a sacred union of souls, a bond of love such as Christ's love for His Church, and I asked myself if I felt any such love for the man who was to become my husband.

I knew I did not. I reminded myself that I had had nearly no conversation with him, that our intercourse had been of the briefest, that I had seen him only three times altogether, and that I scarcely knew him at all.

And yet I was going to marry him! In a few days more I should be his wife, and we should be bound together as long as life should last!

Then I remembered what Father Dan had said about a girl's first love, her first love-letter, and all the sweet, good things that should come to her at the time of her marriage.

None of them had come to me. I do not think my thoughts of love were ever disturbed by any expectation of the delights of the heart—languors of tenderness, long embraces, sighs and kisses, and the joys and fevers of the flesh—for I knew nothing about them. But, nevertheless, I asked myself if I had mistaken the matter altogether. Was love really necessary? In all their busy preparations neither my father, nor my husband, nor the lawyers, nor the Bishop himself, had said anything about that.

I began to sleep badly and to dream. It was always the same dream. I was in a frozen region of the far north or south, living in a ship which was stuck fast in the ice, and had a great frowning barrier before it that was full of dangerous crevasses. Then for some reason I wanted to write a letter, but was unable to do so, because somebody had trodden on my pen and broken it.

It seems strange to me now as I look back upon that time, that I did not know what angel was troubling the waters of my soul—that Nature was whispering to me, as it whispers to every girl at the first great crisis of her life. But neither did I know what angel was leading my footsteps when, three mornings before my wedding-day, I got up early and went out to walk in the crisp salt air.

Almost without thinking I turned down the lane that led to the shore, and before I was conscious of where I was going, I found myself near Sunny Lodge. The chimney was smoking for breakfast, and there was a smell of burning turf coming from the house, which was so pretty and unchanged, with the last of the year's roses creeping over the porch and round the windows of the room in which I had slept when a child.

Somebody was digging in the garden. It was the doctor in his shirt sleeves.

"Good morning, doctor," I called, speaking over the fence.

He rested on his spade and looked up, but did not speak for a moment.

"Don't you know who I am?" I asked.

"Why yes, of course; you must be . . ."

Without finishing he turned his head towards the porch and cried:

"Mother! Mother! Come and see who's here at last!"

Martin's mother came out of the porch, a little smaller, I thought, but with the same dear womanly face over her light print frock, which was as sweet as may-blossom.

She held up both hands at sight of me and cried:

"There, now! What did I tell you, doctor! Didn't I say they might marry her to fifty lords, but she wouldn't forget her old friends?"

I laughed, the doctor laughed, and then she laughed, and the sweetest part of it was that she did not know what we were laughing at.

Then I opened the gate and stepped up and held out my hand, and involuntarily she wiped her own hand (which was covered with meal from the porridge she was making) before taking mine.

"Goodness me, it's Mary O'Neill."

"Yes, it's I."

"But let me have a right look at you," she said, taking me now by both hands. "They were saying such wonderful things about the young misthress that I wasn't willing to believe them. But, no, no," she said, after a moment, "they didn't tell me the half."

I was still laughing, but it was as much as I could do not to cry, so I said:

"May I come in?"

"My goodness yes, and welcome," she said, and calling to the doctor to wash his hands and follow us, she led the way into the kitchen-parlour, where the kettle was singing from the "slowery" and a porridge-pot was bubbling over the fire.

"Sit down. Take the elbow-chair in the chiollagh [the hearth place]. There! That's nice. Aw, yes, you know the house."

Being by this time unable to speak for a lump in my throat that was hurting me, I looked round the room, so sweet, so homely, so closely linked with tender memories of my childhood, while Martin's mother (herself a little nervous and with a touching softness in her face) went on talking while she stirred the porridge with a porridge-stick.

"Well, well! To think of all the years since you came singing carols to my door! You remember it, don't you? . . . Of course you do. 'Doctor,' I said, 'don't talk foolish. *She'll* not forget. *I* know Mary O'Neill. She may be going to be a great lady, but haven't I nursed her on my knee?' "

"Then you've heard what's to happen?" I asked.

"Aw yes, woman, yes," she answered in a sadder tone, I thought. "Everybody's bound to hear it—what with the bands practising for the procession, and the bullocks roasting for the poor, and the fireworks and the illuminations, and I don't know what."

She was silent for a moment after that, and then in her simple way she said:

"But it's all as one if you love the man, even if he *is* a lord."

"You think that's necessary, don't you?"

"What, *millish?*"

"Love. You think it's necessary to love one's husband?"

"Goodness sakes, girl, yes. If you don't have love, what have you? What's to keep the pot boiling when the fire's getting low and the winter's coming on, maybe? The doctor's telling me some of the fine ladies in London are marrying without it—just for money and titles and all to that. But I can't believe it, I really can't! They've got their troubles same as ourselves, poor things, and what's the use of their fine clothes and grand carriages when the dark days come and the night's falling on them?"

It was harder than ever to speak now, so I got up to look at some silver cups that stood on the mantelpiece.

"Martin's," said his mother, to whom they were precious as rubies. "He won them at swimming and running and leaping and climbing and all to that. Aw, yes, yes! He was always grand at games, if he couldn't learn his lessons, poor boy. And now he's gone away from us—looking for South Poles somewheres."

"I know—I saw him in Rome," said I.

She dropped her porridge-stick and looked at me with big eyes.

"Saw him? In Rome, you say? After he sailed, you mean?"

I nodded, and then she cried excitedly to the doctor who was just then coming into the house, after washing his hands under the pump.

"Father, she saw himself in Rome after he sailed."

There was only one *himself* in that house, therefore it was not difficult for the doctor to know who was meant. And so great was the eagerness of the old people to hear the last news of the son who was the apple of their eye that I had to stay to breakfast and tell them all about our meeting.

While Martin's mother laid the table with oat-cake and honey and bowls of milk and deep plates for the porridge, I told the little there was to tell, and then listened to their simple comments.

"There now, doctor! Think of that! Those two meeting in foreign parts that used to be such friends when they were children! Like brother and sister, you might say. And whiles and whiles we were thinking that some day . . . but we'll say no more about that now, doctor."

"No, we'll say no more about that now, Christian Ann," said the doctor.

Then there was a moment of silence, and it was just as if they had been rummaging among half-forgotten things in a dark corner of their house, and had come upon a cradle, and the child that had lived in it was dead.

It was sweet, but it was also painful to stay long in that house of love, and as soon as I had eaten my oat-cake and honey I got up to go. The two good souls saw me to the door, saying I was not to expect either of them at the Big House on my wedding-day, because she was no woman for smart clothes, and the doctor, who was growing rheumatic, had given up his night-calls, and therefore his gig, so as to keep down expenses.

"We'll be at the church, though," said Martin's mother.

"And if we don't see you to speak to, you'll know we're there and wishing you happiness in our hearts."

I could not utter a word when I left them; but after I had walked a little way I looked back, intending to wave my farewell, and there they were together at the gate still, and one of her hands was on the doctor's shoulder—the sweet woman who had chosen love against the world, and did not regret it, even now when the night was falling on her.

I had to pass the Presbytery on my way home, and as I did so, I saw Father Dan in his study. He threw up the window sash and called in a soft voice, asking me to wait until he came down to me.

He came down hurriedly, just as he was, in his worn and discoloured cassock and biretta, and walked up the road by my side, breathing rapidly and obviously much agitated.

"The Bishop is staying with me over the wedding, and he is in such a fury that . . . Don't worry. It will be all right. But . . ."

"Yes?"

"Did you see young Martin Conrad while you were in Rome?"

I answered that I did.

"And did anything pass between you . . . about your marriage, I mean?"

I told him all that I had said to Martin, and all that Martin had said to me.

"Because he has written a long letter to the Bishop denouncing it, and calling on him to stop it."

"To stop it?"

"That's so. He says it is nothing but trade and barter, and if the Church is willing to give its blessing to such rank commercialism, let it bless the Stock Exchange, let it sanctify the slave market."

"Well?"

"The Bishop threatens to tell your father. 'Who is this young man,' he says, 'who dares to . . .' But if I thought there was nothing more to your marriage than . . . If I imagined that what occurred in the case of your dear mother . . But that's not all."

"Not all?"

"No. Martin has written to me too, saying worse—far worse."

"What does he say, Father Dan?"

"I don't really know if I ought to tell you, I really don't. Yet if it's true . . . if there's anything in it . . ."

I was trembling, but I begged him to tell me what Martin had said. He told me. It was about my intended husband—that he was a man of irregular life, a notorious loose liver, who kept up a connection with somebody in London, a kind of actress who was practically his wife already, and therefore his marriage with me would be—so Martin had said—nothing but "legalised and sanctified concubinage."

With many breaks and pauses my dear old priest told me this story, as if it were something so infamous that his simple and innocent heart could scarcely credit it.

"If I really thought it was true," he said, "that a man living such a life could come here to marry my little . . . But no, God could not suffer a thing like that. I must ask, though. I must make sure. We live so far away in this little island that . . . But I must go back now. The Bishop will be calling for me."

Still deeply agitated, Father Dan left me by the bridge, and at the gate of our drive I found Tommy the Mate on a ladder, covering, with flowers from the conservatory, a triumphal arch which the joiner had hammered up the day before.

The old man hardly noticed me as I passed through, and this prompted me to look up and speak to him.

"Tommy," I said, "do you know you are the only one who hasn't said a good word to me about my marriage?"

"Am I, missy?" he answered, without looking down. "Then maybe that's because I've had so many bad ones to say to other people."

I asked which other people.

"Old Johnny Christopher, for one. I met him last night at the 'Horse and Saddle.' 'Grand doings at the Big House, they're telling me,' says Johnny. 'I won't say no,' I says. 'It'll be a proud day for the grand-daughter of Neill the Lord when she's mistress of Castle Raa,' says Johnny. 'Maybe so,' I says, 'but it'll be a prouder day for Castle Raa when she sets her clane little foot in it.' "

TWENTY-EIGHTH CHAPTER

I SHOULD find it difficult now, after all that has happened since, to convey an adequate idea of the sense of shame and personal dishonour which was produced in me by Father Dan's account of the contents of Martin's letter. It was like opening a door out of a beautiful garden into a stagnant ditch.

That Martin's story was true I had never one moment's doubt, first because Martin had told it, and next because it agreed at all points with the little I had learned of Lord Raa in the only real conversation I had yet had with him.

Obviously he cared for the other woman, and if, like his friend Eastcliff, he had been rich enough to please himself, he would have married her; but being in debt, and therefore in need of an allowance, he was marrying me in return for my father's money.

It was shocking. It was sinful. I could not believe that my father, the lawyers and the Bishop knew anything about it.

I determined to tell them, but how to do so, being what I was, a young girl out of a convent, I did not know.

Never before had I felt so deeply the need of my mother. If she had been alive I should have gone to her, and with my arms about her neck and my face in her breast, I should have told her all my trouble.

There was nobody but Aunt Bridget, and little as I had ever expected to go to her under any circumstances, with many misgivings and after much hesitation I went.

It was the morning before the day of my marriage. I followed my aunt as she passed through the house like a biting March wind, scolding everybody, until I found her in her own room.

She was ironing her new white cap, and as I entered (looking pale, I suppose) she flopped down her flat iron on to its stand and cried:

"Goodness me, girl, what's amiss? Caught a cold with your morning walks, eh? Haven't I enough on my hands without that? We must send for the doctor straight. We can't have *you* laid up now, after all this trouble and expense."

"It isn't that, Auntie."

"Then in the name of goodness what is it?"

I told her, as well as I could for the cold grey eyes that kept looking at me through their gold-rimmed spectacles. At first my aunt listened with amazement, and then she laughed outright.

"So *you've* heard that story, have you? Mary O'Neill," she said, with a thump of her flat iron, "I'm surprised at you."

I asked if she thought it wasn't true.

"How do I know if it's true? And what do I care whether it is or isn't? Young men will be young men, I suppose."

She went on with her ironing as she added:

"Did you expect you were marrying a virgin? If every woman asked for that there would be a nice lot of old maids in the world, wouldn't there?"

I felt myself flushing up to the forehead, yet I managed to say:

"But if he is practically married to the other woman. . . ."

"Not he married. Whoever thinks about marriage in company like that? You might as well talk about marriage in the hen coop."

"But all the same if he cares for her, Auntie. . . ."

"Who says he cares for her? And if he does he'll settle her off and get rid of her before he marries you."

"But will that be right?" I said, whereupon my aunt rested her iron and looked at me as if I had said something shameful.

"Mary O'Neill, what do you mean? Of course it will be right. He shouldn't have two women, should he? Do you think the man's a barn-door rooster?"

My confusion was increasing, but I said that in any case my intended husband could not care for *me,* or he would have seen more of me.

"Oh, you'll see enough of him by and by. Don't you worry about that."

I said I was not sure that he had made me care much for him.

"Time enough for that, too. You can't expect the man to work miracles."

Then, with what courage was left me, I tried to say that I had been taught to think of marriage as a sacrament, instituted by the Almighty so that those who entered it might live together in union, peace and love, whereas . . .

But I had to stop, for Aunt Bridget, who had been looking at me with her hard lip curled, said:

"Tut! That's all right to go to church with on Sunday, but on weekdays marriage is no moonshine, I can tell you. It's a practical matter. Just an arrangement for making a home, and getting a family, and bringing up children—that's what marriage is, if you ask me."

"But don't you think love is necessary?"

"Depends what you mean by love. If you mean what they talk about in poetry and songs—bleeding hearts and sighs and kisses and all that nonsense—no!'' said my aunt, with a heavy bang on her ironing.

''That's what people mean when they talk about marrying for love, and it generally ends in poverty and misery, and sensible women have nothing to do with it. Look at me,'' she said, spitting on the bottom of her iron, ''do you think I married for love when I married the colonel? No indeed! 'Here's a quiet respectable man with a nice income,' I said, 'and if I put my little bit to his little bit we'll get along comfortably if he *is* a taste in years,' I said. Look at your mother, though. She was one of the marrying-for-love kind, and if we had let her have her way where would she have been afterwards with her fifteen years as an invalid? And where would you have been by this time? No,'' said Aunt Bridget, bringing down her flat-iron with a still heavier bang, ''a common-sense marriage, founded on suitability of position and property, and all that, is the only proper sort of match. And that's what's before you now, girl, so for goodness' sake don't go about like the parish pan, letting every busybody make mischief with you. My Betsy wouldn't if *she* had your chance—I can tell you that much, my lady.''

I did not speak. There was another bang or two of the flat-iron, and then,

''Besides, love will come. Of course it will. It will come in time. If you don't exactly love your husband when you marry him you'll love him later on. A wife ought to teach herself to love her husband. I know I had to, and if . . .''

''But if she can't, Auntie?''

''Then she ought to be ashamed of herself, and say nothing about it.''

It was useless to say more, so I rose to go.

''Yes, go,'' said Aunt Bridget. ''I'm so bothered with other people's business that my head's all through-others. And, Mary O'Neill,'' she said, looking after me as I passed through the door, ''for mercy's sake do brighten up a bit, and don't look as if marrying a husband was like taking a dose of jalap. It isn't as bad as that, anyway.''

It served me right. I should have known better. My aunt and I spoke different languages; we stood on different ground.

Returning to my room I found a letter from Father Dan. It ran—

"Dear Daughter in Jesus,

"I have been afraid to go far into the story we spoke about from fear of offending my Bishop, but I have inquired of your father and he assures me that there is not a word of truth in it.

"So I am compelled to believe that our good Martin must have been misinformed, and am dismissing the matter from my mind. Trusting you will dismiss it from your mind also,

"Yours in Xt.,

"D. D."

TWENTY-NINTH CHAPTER

I COULD not do as Father Dan advised, being now enmeshed in the threads of innumerable impulses unknown to myself, and therefore firmly convinced that Martin's story was not only true, but a part of the whole sordid business whereby a husband was being bought for me.

With this thought I went about all day, asking myself what I could do even yet, but finding no answer until nine o'clock at night, when, immediately after supper (we lived country fashion), Aunt Bridget said:

"Now then, off to bed, girls. Everybody must be stirring early in the morning."

And then I slipped upstairs to my room, and replied to Father Dan.

Never had I written such a letter before. I poured my whole heart on to the paper, saying what marriage meant to me, as the Pope himself had explained it, a sacrament implying and requiring love as the very soul of it, and since I did not feel this love for the man I was about to marry, and had no grounds for thinking he felt it for me, and being sure that other reasons had operated to bring us together, I begged Father Dan, by his memory of my mother, and his affection for me, and his desire to see me good and happy, to intervene with my father and the Bishop, even at this late hour, and at the church door itself to stop the ceremony.

It was late before I finished, and I thought the household was asleep, but just as I was coming to an end I heard my father moving in the room below, and then a sudden impulse came to me, and with a new thought I went downstairs and knocked at his door.

"Who's there?" he cried. "Come in."

He was sitting in his shirt sleeves, shaving before a looking-glass which was propped up against two ledgers. The lather on his upper lip gave his face a fierce if rather grotesque expression.

"Oh, it's you," he said. "Sit down. Got to do this to-night—goodness knows if I'll have time for it in the morning."

I took the seat in the ingle which Father Dan occupied on the night of my birth. The fire had nearly burnt out.

"Thought you were in bed by this time. Guess I should have been in bed myself but for this business. Look there"—he pointed with the handle of his razor to the table littered with papers—"that's a bit of what I've had to do for you. I kind o' think you ought to be grateful to your father, my gel."

I told him he was very kind, and then, very nervously, said:

"But are you sure it's quite right, sir?"

Not catching my meaning he laughed.

"Right?" he said, holding the point of his nose aside between the tips of his left thumb and first finger. "Guess it's about as right as law and wax can make it."

"I don't mean that, sir. I mean . . ."

"What?" he said, facing round.

Then trembling and stammering I told him. I did not love Lord Raa. Lord Raa did not love me. Therefore I begged him for my sake, for his sake, for everybody's sake (I think I said for my mother's sake also) to postpone our marriage.

At first my father seemed unable to believe his own ears.

"Postpone? Now? After all this money spent? And everything signed and sealed and witnessed!"

"Yes, if you please, sir, because. . . ."

I got no farther, for flinging down his razor my father rose in a towering rage.

"Are you mad? Has somebody been putting the evil eye on you? The greatest match this island has ever seen, and you say postpone—put if off, stop it, that's what you mean. Do you want to make a fool of a man? At the last moment, too. Just when there's nothing left but to go to the High Bailiff and the Church! . . . But I see—I see what it is. It's that young Conrad—he's been writing to you."

I tried to say no, but my father bore me down.

"Don't go to deny it, ma'am. He has been writing to every one—the Bishop, Father Dan, myself even. Denouncing the marriage if you plaze."

My father, in his great excitement, was breaking with withering scorn into his native speech.

"Aw yes, though, denouncing and damning it, they're telling me! Mighty neighbourly of him, I'm sure! Just a neighbour lad without a penny at his back to take all that throuble! If I had known he felt like that about it I might have axed his consent! The imperence, though! The imperence of sin! A father has no rights, it seems! A daughter is a separate being, and all to that! Well, well! Amazing thick, isn't it?"

He was walking up and down the room with his heavy tread, making the floor shake.

"Then that woman in Rome—I wouldn't trust but she has been putting notions into your head, too. All the new-fangled fooleries, I'll go bail. Women and men equal, not a ha'p'orth of difference between them! The blatherskites!"

I was silenced, and I must have covered my face and cried, for after a while my father softened, and touching my shoulder he asked me if a man of sixty-five was not likely to know better than a girl of nineteen what was good for her, and whether I supposed he had not satisfied himself that this marriage was a good thing for me and for him and for everybody.

"Do you think I'm not doing my best for you, gel—my very best?"

I must have made some kind of assent, for he said:

"Then don't moither me any more, and don't let your Aunt Bridget moither me—telling me and telling me what I might have done for her own daughter instead."

At last, with a kind of rough tenderness, he took me by the arm and raised me to my feet.

"There, there, go to bed and get some sleep. We'll have to start off for the High Bailiff's early in the morning."

My will was broken down. I could resist no longer. Without a word more I left him.

Returning to my room I took the letter I had been writing to Father Dan and tore it up piece by piece. As I did so I felt as if I were tearing up a living thing—something of myself, my heart and all that was contained in it.

Then I threw open the window and leant out. I could hear the murmur of the sea. I felt as if it were calling to me, though I could not interpret its voice. The salt air was damp and it refreshed my eyelids.

At length I got into bed, shivering with cold. When I had put out the light I noticed that the moon, which was near the full, had a big yellow ring of luminous vapour around it.

THIRTIETH CHAPTER

My sleep that night was much troubled by dreams. It was the same dream as before, again and again repeated—the dream of frozen regions and of the great ice barrier, and then of the broken pen.

When I awoke in the hazy light of the dawn I thought of what the Pope had said about beginning my wedding-day with penance and communion, so I rose at once to go to church.

The dawn was broadening, but the household was still asleep, only the servants in the kitchen stirring when I stepped through a side door, and set out across the fields.

The dew was thick on the grass, and under the gloom of a heavy sky the day looked cold and cheerless. A wind from the south-east had risen during the night, the sea was white with breakers, and from St. Mary's Rock there came the far-off moaning of surging waves.

The church, too, when I reached it, looked empty and chill. The sacristan in the dim choir was arranging lilies and marguerites about the high altar, and only one poor woman, with a little red and black shawl over her head and shoulders, was kneeling in the side chapel where Father Dan was saying Mass, with a sleepy little boy in clogs to serve him.

The woman was quite young, almost as young as myself, but she was already a widow, having lately lost her husband "at the herrings" somewhere up by Stornoway, where he had gone down in a gale, leaving her with one child, a year old, and another soon to come.

All this she told me the moment I knelt near her. The poor thing seemed to think I ought to have remembered her, for she had been at school with me in the village.

"I'm Bella Quark that was," she whispered. "I married Willie Shimmin of the Lhen, you recollect. It's only a month this morning since he was lost, but it seems like years and years. There isn't nothing in the world like it."

She knew about my marriage, and said she wished me joy, though the world was "so dark and lonely for some." Then she said something about her "lil Willie." She had left him asleep in her cottage on the Curragh, and he might awake and cry before she got back, so she hoped Father Dan wouldn't keep her long.

I was so touched by the poor thing's trouble that I almost forgot my own, and creeping up to her side I put my arm through hers as we knelt together, and that was how the Father found us when he turned to put the holy wafer on our tongues.

The wind must have risen higher while I was in the church, for when I was returning across the fields it lashed my skirts about my legs so that I could scarcely walk. A mist had come down and made a sort of monotonous movement in the mountains where they touched the vague line of the heavy sky.

I should be afraid to say that Nature was still trying to speak to me in her strange inarticulate voice, but I cannot forget that a flock of yearlings, which had been sheltering under a hedge, followed me bleating to the last fence, and that the moaning of the sea about St. Mary's Rock was the last sound I heard as I re-entered the house.

Everything there was running like a mill-race by this time. The servants were flying to and fro, my cousins were calling downstairs in accents of alarm, Aunt Bridget was answering them in tones of vexation, and my father was opening doors with a heavy push and closing them with a clash.

They were all so suddenly pacified when I appeared that it flashed upon me at the moment that they must have thought I had run away.

"Goodness gracious me, girl, where have you been?" said Aunt Bridget.

I told her, and she was beginning to reproach me for not ordering round the carriage, instead of making my boots and stockings damp by traipsing across the grass, when my father said:

"That'll do, that'll do! Change them and take a snack of something. I guess we're due at Holmtown in half an hour."

I ate my breakfast standing, the car was brought round, and by eight o'clock my father and I arrived at the house of the High Bailiff, who had to perform the civil ceremony of my marriage according to the conditions required by law.

The High Bailiff was on one knee before the fire in his office, holding a newspaper in front of it to make it burn.

"Nobody else here yet?" asked my father.

"Traa dy liooar" (time enough), the High Bailiff muttered.

He was an elderly man of intemperate habits who spent his nights at the "Crown and Mitre," and was apparently out of humour at having been brought out of bed so early.

His office was a room of his private house. It had a high desk, a stool and a revolving chair. Placards were pinned on the walls, one over another, and a Testament, with the binding much worn, lay on a table. The place looked half like a doctor's consulting room, and half like a small police court.

Presently Mr. Curphy, my father's advocate, came in, rather irritatingly cheerful in that chill atmosphere, and, half an hour late, my intended husband arrived, with his London lawyer and his friend Eastcliff.

My mind was far from clear and I had a sense of seeing things by flashes only, but I remember that I thought Lord Raa was very nervous, and it even occurred to me that early as it was he had been drinking.

"Beastly nuisance, isn't it?" he said to me aside, and then there was something about "this legal fuss and fuddlement."

With the air of a man with a grievance the High Bailiff took a big book out of the desk, and a smaller one off a shelf, and then we sat in a half circle, and the ceremony began.

It was very brief and cold like a matter of business. As far as I can remember it consisted of two declarations which Lord Raa and I made first to the witnesses present and afterwards to each other. One of them stated that we knew of no lawful impediment why we should not be joined together in matrimony, and the other declared that we were there and then so joined.

I remember that I repeated the words automatically, as the High Bailiff in his thick alcoholic voice read them out of the smaller of his books, and that Lord Raa, in tones of obvious impatience, did the same.

Then the High Bailiff opened the bigger of his books, and after writing something in it himself he asked Lord Raa to sign his name, and this being done he asked me also.

"Am I to sign, too?" I asked, vacantly.

"Well, who else do you think?" said Mr. Curphy with a laugh. "Betsy Beauty perhaps, eh?"

"Come, gel, come," said my father, sharply, and then I signed.

I had no longer any will of my own. In this as in everything I did whatever was asked of me.

It was all as dreary and lifeless as an empty house. I can remember that it made no sensible impression upon my heart. My father gave some money (a few shillings I think) to the

High Bailiff, who then tore a piece of perforated blue paper out of the bigger of his books and offered it to me, saying:

"This belongs to you."

"To me?" I said.

"Who else?" said Mr. Curphy, who was laughing again, and then something was said by somebody about marriage lines and no one knowing when a wise woman might not want to use them.

The civil ceremony of my marriage was now over, and Lord Raa, who had been very restless, rose to his feet, saying:

"Beastly early drive. Anything in the house to steady one's nerves, High Bailiff?"

The High Bailiff made some reply, at which the men laughed, all except my father. Then they left me and went into another room, the dining-room, and I heard the jingling of glasses and the drinking of healths while I sat before the fire with my foot on the fender and my marriage lines in my hand.

My brain was still numbed. I felt as one might feel if drowned in the sea and descending, without quite losing consciousness, to the depths of its abyss.

I remember I thought that what I had just gone through differed in no respect from the signing of my marriage settlement, except that in the one case I had given my husband rights over my money, my father's money, whereas in this case I seemed to have given him rights over myself.

Otherwise it was all so cold, so drear, so dead, so unaffecting.

The blue paper had slipped out of my hand on to the worn hearthrug when my helpless meditations were interrupted by the thrumming and throbbing of the motor-car outside, and by my father, who was at the office door, saying in his loud, commanding voice:

"Come, gel, guess it's time for you to be back."

Half an hour afterwards I was in my own room at home, and given over to the dressmakers. I was still being moved automatically—a creature without strength or will.

THIRTY-FIRST CHAPTER

I HAVE only an indefinite memory of floating vaguely through the sights and sounds of the next two hours—of everybody except myself being wildly excited; of my cousins calling repeatedly from unseen regions of the house; of Aunt Bridget scolding indiscriminately; of the dressmakers chattering without ceasing as they fitted on my wedding dress; of their standing off from me at intervals with cries of delight at the success of their efforts; of the wind roaring in the chimney; of the church-bells ringing in the distance; of the ever-increasing moaning of the sea about St. Mary's Rock; and finally of the rumbling of the rubber wheels of several carriages and the plash of horses' hoofs on the gravel of the drive.

When the dressmakers were done with me I was wearing an ivory satin dress, embroidered in silver, with a coronal of myrtle and orange blossoms under the old Limerick lace of the family veil, as well as a string of pearls and one big diamond of the noble house I was marrying into. I remember they said my black hair shone with a blue lustre against the sparkling gem, and I dare say I looked gay on the outside anyway.

At last I heard a fluttering of silk outside my room, and a running stream of chatter going down the stairs, followed by the banging of carriage doors, and then my father's deep voice, saying:

"Bride ready? Good! Time to go, I guess."

He alone had made no effort to dress himself up, for he was still wearing his every-day serge and his usual heavy boots There was not even a flower in his button-hole.

We did not speak very much on our way to church, but I found a certain comfort in his big warm presence as we sat together in the carriage with the windows shut, for the rising storm was beginning to frighten me.

"It will be nothing," said my father. "Just a puff of wind and a slant of rain maybe."

The little church was thronged with people. Even the galleries were full of the children from the village school. There was a twittering overhead like that of young birds in a tree, and as I walked up the nave on my father's arm I could not help but hear over the sound of the organ the whispered words of the people in the pews on either side of us.

"Dear heart alive, the straight like her mother she is, bless her!"

"Goodness yes, it's the poor misfortunate mother come to life again."

" 'Deed, but the daughter's in luck, though."

Lord Raa was waiting for me by the communion rail. He looked yet more nervous than in the morning, and, though he was trying to bear himself with his usual composure, there was (or I thought there was) a certain expression of fear in his face which I had never seen before.

His friend and witness, Mr. Eastcliff, wearing a carnation button-hole, was by his side, and his aunt, Lady Margaret, carrying a sheaf of beautiful white flowers, was standing near.

My own witnesses and bridesmaids, Betsy Beauty and Nessy MacLeod, in large hats, with soaring black feathers, were behind me. I could hear the rustle of their rose-coloured skirts and the indistinct buzz of their whispered conversation, as well as the more audible reproofs of Aunt Bridget, who in a crinkly black silk dress and a bonnet like a half moon, was telling them to be silent and to look placid.

At the next moment I was conscious that a bell had been rung in the chancel; that the organ had stopped; that the coughing and hemming in the church had ceased; that somebody was saying "Stand here, my lord"; that Lord Raa, with a nervous laugh, was asking "Here?" and taking a place by my side; that the lighted altar, laden with flowers, was in front of me; and that the Bishop in his vestments, Father Dan in his surplice and white stole, and a clerk carrying a book and a vessel of holy water were beginning the service.

Surely never was there a sadder ceremony. Never did any girl under similar circumstances feel a more vivid presentiment of the pains and penalties that follow on a forced and ill-assorted marriage. And yet there came to me in the course of the service such a startling change of thought as wiped out for a while all my sadness, made me forget the compulsion that had been put upon me, and lifted me into a realm of spiritual ecstasy.

The Bishop began with a short litany which asked God's blessing on the ceremony which was to join together two of His children in the bonds of holy wedlock. While that was going on I was conscious of nothing except the howling of the wind about the church windows and the far-off tolling of the bell on St. Mary's Rock—nothing but this and a voice within me which seemed to say again and again, "I don't love him! I don't love him!"

But hardly had the actual ceremony commenced when I began to be overawed by the solemnity and divine power of the service, and by the sense of God leaning over my littleness and guiding me according to His will.

What did it matter how unworthy were the preparations that had led up to this marriage if God was making it? God makes all marriages that are blessed by His Church, and therefore He overrules to His own good ends all human impulses, however sordid or selfish they may be.

After that thought came to me nothing else seemed to matter, and nothing, however jarring or incongruous, was able to lower the exaltation of my spirit.

But the service, which had this effect upon me, appeared to have an exactly opposite effect on Lord Raa. His nervousness increased visibly, though he did his best to conceal it by a lightness of manner that sometimes looked like derision.

Thus when the Bishop stepped down to us and said:

"James Charles Munster, wilt thou take Mary here present for thy lawful wife, according to the rite of our holy Mother the Church," my husband halted and stammered over his answer, saying beneath his breath, "I thought I was a heretic."

But when the corresponding question was put to me, and Father Dan thinking I must be nervous, leaned over me and whispered, "Don't worry, child, take your time," I replied in a loud, clear, unfaltering voice:

"I will."

And again, when my husband had to put the ring and the gold and silver on the salver (he fumbled and dropped them as he did so, and fumbled and dropped them a second time when he had to take them up after they had been blessed, laughing too audibly at his own awkwardness), and then repeat after the Bishop:

"With this ring I thee wed; this gold and silver I thee give; with my body I thee worship; and with all my worldly goods I thee endow," he tendered the ring slowly and with an obvious effort.

But I took it without trembling, because I was thinking that, in spite of all I had heard of his ways of life, this solemn and sacred sacrament made him mine and no one else's.

It is all very mysterious; I cannot account for it; I only know it was so, and that, everything considered, it was perhaps the strangest fact of all my life.

I remember that more than once during the ceremony Father Dan spoke to me softly and caressingly, as if to a child, but I felt no need of his comforting, for my strength was from a higher source.

I also remember that it was afterwards said that all through the ceremony the eyes of the newly-wedded couple seemed sedulously to shun each other, but if I did not look at my husband it was because my marriage was like a prayer to me, carrying me back, with its sense of purity and sanctity, to the little sunlit church in Rome where Mildred Bankes had taken her vows.

After the marriage service there was Nuptial Mass and Benediction (special dispensation from Rome), and that raised to a still higher pitch the spiritual exaltation which sustained me.

Father Dan read the Epistle beginning "Let wives be subject to their husbands," and then the Bishop read the Gospel, concluding, "Therefore now they are not two, but one flesh: what therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."

I had trembled when I thought of these solemn and sonorous words in the solitude of my own room, but now that they were spoken before the congregation I had no fear, no misgiving, nothing but a sense of rapture and consecration.

The last words being spoken and Lord Raa and I being man and wife, we stepped into the sacristy to sign the register, and not even there did my spirit fail me. I took up the pen and signed my name without a tremor. But hardly had I done so when I heard a rumbling murmur of voices about me—first the Bishop's voice (in such a worldly tone) and then my father's and then my husband's, and then the voices of many others, in light conversation mingled with trills of laughter. And then, in a moment, in a twinkling, as fast as a snowflake melts upon a stream, the spell of the marriage service seemed to break.

I have heard since that my eyes were wet at that moment and I seemed to have been crying all through the ceremony. I know nothing about that, but I do know that I felt a kind of internal shudder and that it was just as if my soul had suddenly awakened from an intoxicating drug.

The organ began to play the Wedding March, and my husband, putting my arm through his, said, "Come."

There was much audible whispering among the people waiting for us in the church, and as we walked towards the door I saw ghostly faces smiling at me on every side, and heard ghostly voices speaking in whispers that were like the backward plash of wavelets on the shore.

"Sakes alive, how white's she's looking, though," said somebody, and then somebody else said—I could not help but hear it—

"Dear heart knows if her father has done right for all that."

I did not look at anybody, but I saw Martin's mother at the back, and she was wiping her eyes and saying to some one by her side—it must have been the doctor—

"God bless her for the sweet child veen she always was, anyway."

The storm had increased during the service; and the sacristan, who was opening the door for us, had as much as he could do to hold it against the wind, which came with such a rush upon us when we stepped into the porch that my veil and the coronal of myrtle and orange blossoms were torn off my head and blown back into the church.

"God bless my sowl," said somebody—it was Tommy's friend, Johnny Christopher—"there's some ones would be calling that bad luck, though."

A band of village musicians, who were ranged up in the road, struck up "The Black and Grey" as we stepped out of the churchyard, and the next thing I knew was that my husband and I were in the carriage going home.

He had so far recovered from the frightening effects of the marriage service that he was making light of it, and saying:

"When will this mummery come to an end, I wonder?"

The windows of the carriage were rattling with the wind, and my husband had begun to talk of the storm when we came upon the trunk of a young tree which had been torn up by the roots and was lying across the road, so that our coachman had to get down and remove it.

"Beastly bad crossing, I'm afraid. Hope you're a good sailor. Must be in London to-morrow morning, you know."

The band was playing behind us. The leafless trees were beating their bare boughs in front. The wedding bells were pealing. The storm was thundering through the running sky. The sea was very loud.

At my father's gate Tommy the Mate, with a serious face, was standing, cap in hand, under his triumphal arch, which (as well as it could for the wind that was tearing its flowers and scattering them on the ground) spelled out the words "God bless the Happy Bride."

When we reached the open door of the house a group of maids were waiting for us. They were holding on to their white caps and trying to control their aprons, which were swirling about their black frocks. As I stepped out of the carriage they addressed me as "My lady" and "Your ladyship." The seagulls, driven up from the sea, were screaming about the house.

My husband and I went into the drawing-room, and as we stood together on the hearthrug I caught a glimpse of my face in the glass over the mantelpiece. It was deadly white, and had big staring eyes and a look of faded sunshine. I fixed afresh the pearls about my neck and the diamond in my hair, which was much disordered.

Almost immediately the other carriages returned, and relatives and guests began to pour into the room and offer us their congratulations. First came my cousins, who were too much troubled about their own bedraggled appearance to pay much attention to mine. Then Aunt Bridget, holding on to her half-moon bonnet and crying:

"You happy, happy child! But what a wind! There's been nothing like it since the day you were born."

My father came next, like a gale of wind himself, saying:

"I'm proud of you, gel. Right proud I am. You done well."

Then came Lady Margaret, who kissed me without saying many words, and finally a large and varied company of gaily-dressed friends and neighbours, chiefly the "aristocracy" of our island, who lavished many unnecessary "ladyships" upon me, as if the great name reflected a certain glory upon themselves.

I remember that as I stood on the hearthrug with my husband, receiving their rather crude compliments, a vague gaiety came over me, and I smiled and laughed, although my heart was growing sick, for the effect of the wedding-service was ebbing away into a cold darkness like that of a night tide when the moonlight has left it.

It did not comfort me that my husband, without failing in good manners, was taking the whole scene and company with a certain scarcely-veiled contempt which I could not help but see.

And neither did it allay my uneasiness to glance at my father, where he stood at the end of the room, watching, with a look of triumph in his glistening black eyes, his proud guests coming up to me one by one, and seeming to say to himself, "They're here at last! I've bet them! Yes, by gough, I've bet them!"

Many a time since I have wondered if his conscience did not stir within him as he looked across at his daughter in the jewels of the noble house he had married her into—the pale bride with the bridegroom he had bought for her—and thought of the mockery of a sacred union which he had brought about to gratify his pride, his vanity, perhaps his revenge.

But it was all over now. I was married to Lord Raa. In the eyes equally of the law, the world and the Church, the knot between us was irrevocably tied.

MEMORANDUM BY MARTIN CONRAD

> I am no mystic and no spiritualist, and I only mention it as one of the mysteries of human sympathy between far-distant friends, that during a part of the time when my dear one was going through the fierce struggle she describes, and was dreaming of frozen regions and a broken pen, the ship I sailed on had got itself stuck fast in a field of pack ice in latitude 76, under the ice barrier by Charcot Bay, and that while we were lying like helpless logs, cut off from communication with the world, unable to do anything but groan and swear and kick our heels in our bunks at every fresh grinding of our crunching sides, my own mind, sleeping and waking, was for ever swinging back, with a sort of yearning prayer to my darling not to yield to the pressure which I felt so damnably sure was being brought to bear on her.
>
> M. C.

THIRD PART

MY HONEYMOON

THIRTY-SECOND CHAPTER

When the Bishop and Father Dan arrived, the bell was rung and we went in to breakfast.

We breakfasted in the new dining-room, which was now finished and being used for the first time.

It was a gorgeous chamber beblazoned with large candelabra, huge mirrors, and pictures in gold frames—resembling the room it was intended to imitate, yet not resembling it, as a woman over-dressed resembles a well-dressed woman.

My father sat at the head of his table with the Bishop, Lady Margaret and Aunt Bridget on his right, and myself, my husband, Betsy Beauty and Mr. Eastcliff on his left. The lawyers and the trustee were midway down, Father Dan with Nessy MacLeod was at the end, and a large company of our friends and neighbours, wearing highly-coloured flowers on their breasts and in their buttonholes, sat between.

The meal was very long, and much of the food was very large—large fish, large roasts of venison, veal, beef and mutton, large puddings and large cheeses, all cut on the table and served by waiters from Blackwater. There were two long black lines of them—a waiter behind the chair of nearly every other guest.

All through the breakfast the storm raged outside. More than once it drowned the voices of the people at the table, roaring like a wild beast in the great throat of the wide chimney, swirling about the lantern light, licking and lashing and leaping at the outsides of the walls like lofty waves breaking against a breakwater, and sending up a thunderous noise from the sea itself, where the big bell of St. Mary's Rock was still tolling like a knell.

Somebody—it must have been Aunt Bridget again—said there had been nothing like it since the day of my birth, and it must be "fate."

"Chut, woman!" said my father. "We're living in the twentieth century. Who's houlding with such ould wife's wonders now?"

He was intensely excited, and, his excitement betrayed itself, as usual, in reversion to his native speech. Sometimes he surveyed in silence, with the old masterful lift of his eyebrows, his magnificent room and the great guests who were gathered within it; sometimes he whispered to the waiters to be smarter with the serving of the dishes; and sometimes he pitched his voice above the noises within and without and shouted, in country-fashion, to his friends at various points of the table to know how they were faring.

"How are you doing, Mr. Curphy, sir?"

"Doing well, sir. Are you doing well yourself, Mr. O'Neill, sir?"

"Lord-a-massy yes, sir. I'm always doing well, sir."

Never had anybody in Ellan seen so strange a mixture of grandeur and country style. My husband seemed to be divided between amused contempt for it, and a sense of being compromised by its pretence. More than once I saw him, with his monocle in his eye, look round at his friend Eastcliff, but he helped himself frequently from a large decanter of brandy and drank healths with everybody.

There were the usual marriage pleasantries, facetious compliments and chaff, in which to my surprise (the solemnity of the service being still upon me) the Bishop permitted himself to join.

I was now very nervous, and yet I kept up a forced gaiety, though my heart was cold and sick. I remember that I had a preternatural power of hearing at the same time nearly every conversation that was going on at the table, and that I joined in nearly all the laughter.

At a more than usually loud burst of wind somebody said it would be a mercy if the storm did not lift the roof off.

"Chut, man!" cried my father. "Solid oak and wrought iron here. None of your mouldy old monuments that have enough to do to keep their tiles on."

"Then nobody," said my husband with a glance at his friend, "need be afraid of losing his head in your house, sir?"

"Not if he's got one to come in with, sir."

Betsy Beauty, sitting next to Mr. Eastcliff, was wondering if he would do us the honour to visit the island oftener now that his friend had married into it.

"But, my dear Betsy," said my husband, "who would live in this God-forsaken place if he could help it?"

"God-forsaken, is it?" said my father. "Maybe so, sir—but that's what the cuckoo said after he had eaten the eggs out of the thrush's nest and left a mess in it."

Aunt Bridget was talking in doleful tones to Lady Margaret about my mother, saying she had promised her on her death-bed to take care of her child and had been as good as her word, always putting me before her own daughter, although her ladyship would admit that Betsy was a handsome girl, and, now that his lordship was married, there were few in the island that were fit for her.

"Why no, Mrs. MacLeod," said my husband, after another significant glance at his friend, "I dare say you've not got many who can make enough to keep a carriage?"

"Truth enough, sir," said my father. "We've got hundreds and tons that can make debts though."

The breakfast came to an end at length, and almost before the last of the waiters had left the room my father rose to speak.

"Friends all," he said, "the young married couple have to leave us for the afternoon steamer."

"In this weather?" said somebody, pointing up to the lantern light through which the sky was now darkening.

"Chut! A puff of wind and a slant of rain, as I've been saying to my gel here. But my son-in-law, Lord Raa," (loud cheers followed this description, with some laughter and much hammering on the table), "my son-in-law says he has to be in London to-morrow, and this morning my daughter has sworn obedience. . . . What's that, Monsignor? Not obedience exactly? Something like it then, so she's bound to go along with him. So fill up your glasses to the brim and drink to the bride and bridegroom."

As soon as the noise made by the passing of decanters had died down my father spoke again.

"This is the proudest day of my life. It's the day I've worked for and slaved for and saved for, and it's come to pass at last."

There was another chorus of applause.

"What's that you were saying in church, Mr. Curphy, sir? Time brings in its revenges? It does too. Look at me."

My father put his thumbs in the arm-pits of his waistcoat.

"You all know what I am, and where I come from."

My husband put his monocle to his eye and looked up.

"I come from a mud cabin on the Curragh, not a hundred miles from here. My father was kill . . . but never mind about that now. When he left us it was middling hard collar work, I can tell you—what with me working the bit of a croft and the mother weeding for some of you—some of your fathers I mane—ninepence a day dry days, and sixpence all weathers. When I was a lump of a lad I was sworn at in the high road by a gentleman driving in his grand carriage, and the mother was lashed by his . . . but never mind about that neither. I guess I've hustled round considerable since then, and this morning I've married my daughter into the first family in the island."

There was another burst of cheering at this, but it was almost drowned by the loud rattling of the rain which was now falling on the lantern light.

"Monsignor," cried my father, pitching his voice still higher, "what's that you were saying in Rome about the mills of God?"

Fumbling his jewelled cross and smiling blandly the Bishop gave my father the familiar quotation.

"Truth enough, too. The mills of God grind slowly but they're grinding exceeding small. Nineteen years ago I thought I was as sure of what I wanted as when I got out of bed this morning. If my gel here had been born a boy, my son would have sat where his lordship is now sitting. But all's well that ends well! If I haven't got a son I've got a son-in-law, and when I get a grandson he'll be the richest man that ever stepped into Castle Raa, and the uncrowned king of Ellan."

At that there was a tempest of cheers, which, mingling with the clamour of the storm, made a deafening tumult.

"They're saying a dale nowadays about fathers and children—daughters being separate beings, and all to that. But show me the daughter that could do better for herself than my gel's father has done for her. She has a big fortune, and her husband has a big name, and what more do they want in this world anyway?"

"Nothing at all," came from various parts of the room.

"Neighbours," said my father, looking round him with a satisfied smile, "I'm laving you dry as herrings in a hould, but before I call on you to drink this toast I'll ask the Bishop to spake to you. He's a grand man is the Bishop, and in fixing up this marriage I don't in the world know what I could have done without him."

The Bishop, still fingering his jewelled cross and smiling, spoke in his usual suave voice. He firmly believed that the Church had that morning blessed a most propitious and happy union. Something might be said against mixed marriages, but under proper circumstances the Church had never forbidden them and his lordship (this with a deep bow to my husband) had behaved with great liberality of mind.

As for what their genial and rugged host had said of certain foolish and dangerous notions about the relations of father and child, he was reminded that there were still more foolish and dangerous ones about the relations of husband and wife.

From the earliest ages of the Church, however, those relations had been exactly defined. "Let wives be subject to their husbands," said the Epistle we had read this morning, and no less conclusive had been our closing prayer, asking that the wife keep true faith with her husband, being lovely in his eyes even as was Rachel, wise as was Rebecca, and dutiful as was Sara.

"Beautiful!" whispered Aunt Bridget to Lady Margaret. "It's what I always was myself in the days of the dear Colonel."

"And now," said the Bishop, "before you drink this toast and call upon the noble bridegroom to respond to it," (another deep bow to my husband), "I will ask for a few words from the two legal gentlemen who have carried out the admirably judicious financial arrangements without which this happy marriage would have been difficult if not impossible."

Then my husband's lawyer, with a supercilious smile on his clean-shaven face, said it had been an honour to him to assist in preparing the way for the "uncrowned king of Ellan." ("It *has*, sir," cried my father in a loud voice which straightened the gentleman's face instantly); and finally Mr. Curphy, speaking through his long beard, congratulated my father and my husband equally on the marriage, and gave it as his opinion that there could be no better use for wealth than to come to the rescue of an historic family which had fallen on evil times and only required a little money to set it on its feet again.

"The bride and bridegroom!" cried my father; and then everybody rose and there was much cheering, with cries of "His lordship," "His lordship."

All through the speech-making my husband had rolled uneasily in his chair. He had also helped himself frequently from the decanter, so that when he got up to reply he was scarcely sober.

In his drawling voice he thanked the Bishop, and said that having made up his mind to the marriage he had never dreamt of raising difficulties about religion. As to the modern notions about the relations of husband and wife, he did not think a girl brought up in a convent would give him much trouble on that subject.

"Not likely," cried my father. "I'll clear her of that anyway."

"So I thank you for myself and for my family," continued my husband, "and . . . Oh, yes, of course," (this to Lady Margaret). "I thank you for my wife also, and . . . and that's all."

I felt sick and cold and ashamed. A rush of blood came under the skin of my face that must have made me red to the roots of my hair.

In all this speaking about my marriage there had not been one word about myself—myself really, a living soul with all her future happiness at stake. I cannot say what vague impulse took possession of me, but I remember that when my husband sat down I made a forced laugh, though I knew well that I wanted to cry.

In an agony of shame I was beginning to feel a wild desire to escape from the room and even from the house, that I might breathe in some of the free wind outside, when all at once I became aware that somebody else was speaking.

It was Father Dan. He had risen unannounced from his seat at the end of the table. I saw his sack coat which was much worn at the seams; I saw his round face which was flushed; I heard the vibrating note in his soft Irish voice which told me he was deeply moved; and then I dropped my head, for I knew what was coming.

THIRTY-THIRD CHAPTER

"MR. O'NEILL," said Father Dan, "may your parish priest take the liberty of speaking without being spoken to?"

My father made some response, and then a hush fell over the dining-room. Either the storm ceased for a time, or in my great agitation it seemed to do so, for I did not hear it.

"We have heard a great deal about the marriage we have celebrated to-day, but have we not forgotten something? What *is* marriage? Is it the execution of a contract? Is it the signing of a register? Is it even the taking of an oath before an altar? No. Marriage is the sacred covenant which two souls make with each other, the woman with the man, the man with the woman, when she chooses him from all other men, when he chooses her from all other women, to belong to each other for ever, so that no misfortune, no storm of life, no sin on either side shall ever put them apart. That's what marriage is, and all we have been doing to-day is to call on God and man to bear witness to that holy bond."

My heart was beating high. I raised my head, and I think my eyes must have been shining. I looked across at the Bishop. His face was showing signs of vexation.

"Mr. O'Neill, sir," cried Father Dan, raising his trembling voice, "you say your daughter has a big fortune and her husband has a big name, and what more do they want in this world? I'll tell you what they want, sir. They want love, love on both sides, if they are to be good and happy, and if they've got that they've got something which neither wealth nor rank can buy."

I had dropped my head again, but under my eyelashes I could see that the company were sitting spell-bound. Only my husband was shuffling in his seat, and the Bishop was plucking at his gold chain.

"My Bishop," said Father Dan, "has told us of the submission a wife owes to her husband, and of her duty to be lovely and wise and faithful in his eyes. But isn't it the answering thought that the husband on his part owes something to the wife? Aren't we told that he shall put away everything and everybody for her sake, and cleave to her and cling to her and they shall be one flesh? Isn't that, too, a divine commandment?"

My heart was throbbing so loud by this time that the next words were lost to me. When I came to myself again Father Dan was saying:

"Think what marriage means to a woman—a young girl especially. It means the breaking of old ties, the beginning of a new life, the setting out into an unknown world on a voyage from which there can be no return. In her weakness and her helplessness she leaves one dependency for another, the shelter of a father for the shelter of a husband. What does she bring to the man she marries? Herself, everything she is, everything she can be, to be made or marred by him, and never, never, never to be the same to any other man whatsoever as long as life shall last.''

More than ever now, but for other reasons, I wanted to fly from the room.

''Friends,'' cried Father Dan, ''we don't know much of the bridegroom in this parish, but we know the bride. We've known her all her life. We know what she is. I do, anyway. If you are her father, Mr. O'Neill, sir, I am her father also. I was in this house when she was born. I baptized her. I took her out of the arms of the angel who bore her. So she's my child too, God bless her . . . .''

His voice was breaking—I was sobbing—though he was speaking so loudly I could scarcely hear him—I could scarcely see him—I only knew that he was facing about in our direction and raising his trembling hand to my husband.

''She is my child, too, I say, and now that she is leaving us, now that you are taking her away from us, I charge you, my lord, to be good and faithful to her, as you will have to answer for her soul some day.''

What else he said I do not know. From that moment I was blind and deaf to everything. Nevertheless I was conscious that after Father Dan had ceased to speak there was a painful silence. I thought the company seemed to be startled and even a little annoyed by the emotion so suddenly shot into their midst. The Bishop looked vexed, my father looked uncomfortable, and my husband, who had been drinking glass after glass of brandy, was muttering something about ''a sermon.''

It had been intended that Mr. Eastcliff should speak for the bridesmaids, and I was afterwards told by Betsy Beauty that he had prepared himself with many clever epigrams, but everybody felt there could be no more speaking of any kind now. After a few awkward moments my father looked at his watch and said it was about time for us to start if we were to catch the steamer, so I was hurried upstairs to change for our journey.

When I came down again, in my tailor-made travelling dress with sables, the whole company was in the hall and everybody seemed to be talking at the same time, making a noise like water in a weir.

I was taken possession of by each in turn. Nessy MacLeod told me in an aside what an excellent father I had. Betsy

Beauty whispered that Mr. Eastcliff was so handsome and their tastes were so similar that she hoped I would invite him to Castle Raa as soon as I came back. Aunt Bridget, surrounded by a group of sympathising ladies (including Lady Margaret, who was making an obvious effort to be gracious) was wiping her eyes and saying I had always been her favourite and she had faithfully done her duty by me.

"Mary, my love," she said, catching my eye, "I'm just telling her ladyship I don't know in the world what I'll do when you are gone."

My husband was there too, wearing a heavy overcoat with the collar up, and receiving from a group of insular gentlemen their cheerful prognostics of a bad passage.

"'Deed, but I'm fearing it will be a dirty passage, my lord."

"Chut!" said my father. "The wind's from the southwest. They'll soon get shelter."

The first of our two cars came round and my husband's valet went off in advance with our luggage. Then the second car arrived, and the time came for our departure. I think I kissed everybody. Everybody seemed to be crying—everybody except myself, for my tears were all gone by this time.

Just as we were about to start, the storm, which must certainly have fallen for a while, sprang up suddenly, and when Tommy the Mate (barely recognisable in borrowed black garments) opened the door the wind came rushing into the house with a long-drawn whirr.

I had said good-bye to the old man, and was stepping into the porch when I remembered Father Dan. He was standing in his shabby sack coat with a sorrowful face in a dark corner by the door, as if he had placed himself there to see the last of me. I wanted to put my arms around his neck, but I knew that would be wrong, so I dropped to my knees and kissed his hand and he gave me his blessing.

My husband, who was waiting by the side of the throbbing automobile, said impatiently:

"Come, come, dear, don't keep me in the rain."

I got into the landaulette, my husband got in after me, the car began to move, there were cries from within the house ("Good-bye!" "Good luck!") which sounded like stifled shrieks as they were carried off by the wind without, and then we were under weigh.

As we turned the corner of the drive something prompted me to look back at my mother's window—with its memories of my first going to school.

At the next moment we were crossing the bridge—with its memories of Martin Conrad and William Rufus.

At the next we were on the road.

THIRTY-FOURTH CHAPTER

"THANK God, that's over," said my husband. Then, half apologetically, he added: "You didn't seem to enjoy it any more than myself, my dear."

At the entrance to our village a number of men stood firing guns; in the middle a group of girls were stretching a rope across the road; a number of small flags, torn by the wind and wet with the rain, were rattling on flagstaffs hung out from some of the window sills; a few women, with shawls over their heads, were sheltering on the weather side of their porches to see us pass.

My husband was impatient of our simple island customs. Once or twice he lowered the window of the car, threw out a handful of silver and at the same time urged the chauffeur to drive quicker. As soon as we were clear of the village he fell back in his seat, saying:

"Heavens, how sleepy I am! No wonder either! Late going to bed last night and up so early this morning."

After a moment he began to yawn, and almost before he could have been aware of it he had closed his eyes. At the next moment he was asleep.

It was a painful, almost a hideous sleep. His cheeks swelled and sank; his lips parted, he was breathing heavily, and sometimes gaping like a carp out of water.

I could not detach my eyes from his face, which, without eyes to relieve it, seemed to be almost repulsive now. It would be difficult to describe my sensations. I felt dreadfully humiliated. Even my personal pride was wounded. I remembered what Father Dan had said about husband and wife being one flesh, and told myself that *this* was what I belonged to, what belonged to me—*this!* Then I tried to reproach and reprove myself, but in order to do so I had to turn my eyes away.

Our road to Blackwater lay over the ridge of a hill much exposed to the wind from the south-west. When we reached this point the clouds seemed to roll up from the sea like tempestuous battalions. Torrential rain fell on the car and came dripping in from the juncture of the landaulette roof. Some of it fell on the sleeper and he awoke with a start.

"Damn——"

He stopped, as if caught in guilt, and began to apologise again.

"Was I asleep? I really think I must have been. Stupid, isn't it? Excuse me."

He blinked his eyes as if to empty them of sleep, looked me over for a moment or two in silence, and then said with a smile which made me shudder:

"So you and I are man and wife, my dear!"

I made no answer, and, still looking fixedly at me, he said:

"Well, worse things might have happened after all—what do *you* think?"

Still I did not answer him, feeling a certain shame, not to say disgust. Then he began to pay me some compliments on my appearance.

"Do you know you're charming, my dear, really charming!"

That stung me, and made me shudder, I don't know why, unless it was because the words gave me the sense of having been used before to other women. I turned my eyes away again.

"Don't turn away, dear. Let me see those big black eyes of yours. I adore black eyes. They always pierce me like a gimlet."

He reached forward as he spoke and drew me to him. I felt frightened and pushed him off.

"What's this?" he said, as if surprised.

But after another moment he laughed, and in the tone of a man who had had much to do with women and thought he knew how to deal with them, he said:

"Wants to be coaxed, does she? They all do, bless them!"

Saying this he pulled me closer to him, putting his arm about my waist, but once more I drew and forcibly pushed him from me.

His face darkened for an instant, and then cleared again.

"Oh, I see," he said. "Offended, is she? Paying me out for having paid so little court to her? Well, she's right there too, bless her! But never mind! You're a decidedly good-looking little woman, my dear, and if I have neglected you thus far, I intend to make up for it during the honeymoon. So come, little gal, let's be friends."

Taking hold of me again, he tried to kiss me, putting at the same time his hand on the bosom of my dress, but I twisted my face aside and prevented him.

."Oh! Oh! Hurt her modesty, have I?" he said, laughing like a man who was quite sure both of himself and of me. "But my little nun will get over that by and by. Wait awhile! Wait awhile!"

By this time I was trembling with the shock of a terror that was entirely new to me. I could not explain to myself the nature of it, but it was there, and I could not escape from it.

Hitherto, when I had thought of my marriage to Lord Raa I had been troubled by the absence of love between us; and what I meant to myself by love—the love of husband and wife—was the kind of feeling I had for the Reverend Mother, heightened and deepened and spiritualised, as I believed, by the fact (with all its mysterious significance) that the one was a man and the other a woman.

But this was something quite different. Not having found in marriage what I had expected, I was finding something else, for there could be no mistaking my husband's meaning when he looked at me with his passionate eyes and said, "Wait awhile!"

I saw what was before me, and in fear of it I found myself wishing that something might happen to save me. I was so frightened that if I could have escaped from the car I should have done so. The only thing I could hope for was that we should arrive at Blackwater too late for the steamer, or that the storm would prevent it from sailing. What relief from my situation I should find in that, beyond the delay of one day, one night (in which I imagined I might be allowed to return home), I did not know. But none the less on that account I began to watch the clouds with a feverish interest.

They were wilder than ever now—rolling up from the south-west in huge black whorls which enveloped the mountains and engulfed the valleys. The wind, too, was howling at intervals like a beast being slaughtered. It was terrible, but not so terrible as the thing I was thinking of. I was afraid of the storm, and yet I was fearfully, frightfully glad of it.

My husband, who, after my repulse, had dropped back into his own corner of the car, was very angry. He talked again of our "God-forsaken island," and the folly of living in it, said our passage would be a long one in any case, and we might lose our connection to London.

"Damnably inconvenient if we do. I've special reasons for being there in the morning," he said.

At a sharp turn of the road the wind smote the car as with an invisible wing. One of the windows was blown in, and to prevent the rain from driving on to us my husband had to hold up a cushion in the gap.

This occupied him until we ran into Blackwater, and then he dropped the cushion and put his head out, although the rain was falling heavily, to catch the first glimpse of the water in the bay.

It was in terrific turmoil. My heart leapt up at the sight of it. My husband swore.

We drew up on the drenched and naked pier. My husband's valet, in waterproofs, came to the sheltered side of the car, and, shouting above the noises of the wind in the rigging of the steamer, he said:

"Captain will not sail to-day, my lord. Inshore wind. Says he couldn't get safely out of the harbour."

My husband swore violently. I was unused to oaths at that time and they cut me like whipcord, but all the same my pulse was bounding joyfully.

"Bad luck, my lord, but only one thing to do now," shouted the valet.

"What's that?" said my husband, growling.

"Sleep in Blackwater to-night, in hopes of weather mending in the morning."

Anticipating this course, he had already engaged rooms for us at the "Fort George."

My heart fell, and I waited for my husband's answer. I was stifling.

"All right, Hobson. If it must be, it must," he answered.

I wanted to speak, but I did not know what to say. There seemed to be nothing that I could say.

A quarter of an hour afterwards we arrived at the hotel, where the proprietor, attended by the manageress and the waiters, received us with rather familiar smiles.

THIRTY-FIFTH CHAPTER

When I began to write I determined to tell the truth and the whole truth. But now I find that the whole truth will require that I should invade some of the most sacred intimacies of human experience. At this moment I feel as if I were on the threshold of one of the sanctuaries of a woman's life, and I ask myself if it is necessary and inevitable that I should enter it.

I have concluded that it *is* necessary and inevitable—necessary to the sequence of my narrative, inevitable for the motive with which I am writing it.

Four times already I have written what is to follow. In the first case I found that I had said too much. In the second I had said too little. In the third I was startled and shocked by the portrait I had presented of myself and could not believe it to be true. In the fourth I saw with a thrill of the heart that the portrait was not only true, but too true. Let me try again.

I entered our rooms at the hotel, my husband's room and mine, with a sense of fear, almost of shame. My sensations at that moment had nothing in common with the warm flood of feeling which comes to a woman when she finds herself alone for the first time with the man she loves, in a little room which holds everything that is of any account to her in the world. They were rather those of a young girl who, walking with a candle through the dark corridors of an empty house at night, is suddenly confronted by a strange face. I was the young girl with the candle; the strange face was my husband's.

We had three rooms, all communicating, a sitting-room in the middle with bedrooms right and left. The bedroom on the right was large and it contained a huge bed with a covered top and tail-boards. That on the left was small, and it had a plain brass and iron bedstead, which had evidently been meant for a lady's maid. I had no maid yet. It was intended that I should engage a French one in London.

Almost immediately on entering the sitting-room my husband, who had not yet recovered from his disappointment, left me to go downstairs, saying with something like a growl that he had telegrams to send to London and instructions to give to his man Hobson.

Without taking off my outer things I stepped up to the windows, which were encrusted with salt from the flying spray. The hotel stood on a rocky ledge above the harbour, and the sound of the sea, beating on the outer side of the pier, came up with a deafening roar. The red-funnelled steamer we should have sailed by lay on the pier's sheltered side, letting down steam, swaying to her creaking hawsers, and heaving to the foam that was surging against her bow.

I was so nervous, so flurried, so preoccupied by vague fears that I hardly saw or heard anything. Porters came up with our trunks and asked me where they were to place them, but I scarcely know how I answered them, although I was aware that everything—both my husband's luggage and mine—was being taken into the large bedroom. A maid asked if she ought to put a light to the fire, and I said "Yes . . . no . . . yes," and presently I heard the fire crackling.

After awhile my husband came back in a better temper and said:

"Confounded nuisance, but I suppose we must make the best of it."

He laughed as he said this, and coming closer and looking me over with a smile which was at the same time passionate and proud, he whispered:

"Dare say we'll not find the time long until to-morrow morning. What do *you* think, my little beauty?"

Something in his voice rather than in his question made my heart beat, and I could feel my face growing hot.

"Not taken off your things yet?" he said. "Come, let me help you."

I drew out my hat-pins and removed my hat. At the same moment my husband removed my sables and cloak, and as he did so he put his arms about me, and held me close to him.

I shuddered. I tried not to, but I could not help it. My husband laughed again, and said:

"Not got over it yet, little woman? Perhaps that's only because you are not quite used to me."

Still laughing he pulled me still closer to him and putting one of his hands under my chin he kissed me on the mouth.

It will be difficult and perhaps it will be ridiculous to say how my husband's first kiss shocked me. My mouth felt parched, I had a sense of intense disgust, and before I was quite aware of what I was doing I had put up both hands to push him off.

"Come, come, this is going too far," he said, in a tone that was half playful, half serious. "It was all very well in the automobile; but here, in your own rooms, you know. . . ."

He broke off and laughed again, saying that if my modesty only meant that nobody had ever kissed me before it made me all the more charming for him.

I could not help feeling a little ashamed of my embarrassment, and crossing in front of my husband I seated myself in a chair before the fire. He looked after me with a smile that made my heart tremble, and then, coming behind my chair, he put his arms about my shoulders and kissed my neck.

A shiver ran through me. I felt as if I had suffered a kind of indecency. I got up and changed my place. My husband watched me with the look of a man who wanted to roar with laughter. It was the proud and insolent as well as passionate look of one who had never so much as contemplated resistance.

"Well, this is funny," he said. "But we'll see presently! We'll see!"

A waiter came in for orders, and early as it was my husband asked for dinner to be served immediately. My heart was fluttering excitedly by this time and I was glad of the relief which the presence of other people gave me.

While the table was being laid my husband talked of the doings of the day. He asked who was "the seedy old priest" who had given us "the sermon" at the wedding breakfast—he had evidently forgotten that he had seen the Father before.

I told him the "seedy old priest" was Father Dan, and he was a saint if ever there was one.

"A saint, is he?" said my husband. "Wish saint were not synonymous with simpleton, though."

Then he gave me his own views of "the holy state of matrimony." By holding people together who ought to be apart it often caused more misery and degradation of character than a dozen entirely natural adulteries and desertions, which a man had sometimes to repair by marriage or else allow himself to be regarded as a seducer and a scoundrel.

I do not think my husband was conscious of the naive coarseness of all this, as spoken to a young girl who had only just become his wife. I am sure he was not aware that he was betraying himself to me in every word he uttered and making the repugnance I had begun to feel for him deepen into horror.

My palms became moist, and again and again I had to dry them with my handkerchief. I was feeling more frightened and more ashamed than I had ever felt before, but nevertheless when we sat down to dinner I tried to compose myself. Partly for the sake of appearance before the servants, and partly because I was taking myself to task for the repugnance I felt towards my husband, I found something to say, though my voice shook.

My husband ate ravenously and drank a good deal. Once or twice, when he insisted on pouring out champagne for me, I clinked glasses with him. Although every moment at table was increasing my fear and disgust, I sometimes allowed myself to laugh.

Encouraged by this he renewed his endearments even before the waiters had left the room, and when they had gone, with orders not to return until he rang, and the door was closed behind them, he switched off the lights, pushed a sofa in front of the fire, put me to sit on it, sat down beside me and redoubled his tenderness.

"How's my demure little nun now?" he said. "Frightened, wasn't she? They're all frightened at first, bless them!"

I could smell the liquor he had been drinking. I could see by the firelight the prominent front tooth (partly hidden by his moustache) which I had noticed when I saw him first, and the down of soft hair which grew as low on his hands as his knuckles. Above all I thought I could feel the atmosphere of other women about him—loose women, bad women as it seemed to me—and my fear and disgust began to be mixed with a kind of physical horror.

For a little while I tried to fight against this feeling, but when he began to put his arms about me, calling me by endearing names, complaining of my coldness, telling me not to be afraid of him, reminding me that I belonged to him now, and must do as he wished, a faintness came over me, I trembled from head to foot and made some effort to rise.

"Let me go," I said.

"Nonsense," he said, laughing and holding me to my seat. "You bewitching little woman! You're only teasing me. How they love to tease, these charming little women!"

The pupils of his eyes were glistening. I closed my own eyes in order to avoid his look. At the next moment I felt his hand stray down my body and in a fury of indignation I broke out of his arms and leapt to my feet.

When I recovered my self-possession I was again looking out of the window, and my husband, who was behind me, was saying in a tone of anger and annoyance:

"What's the matter with you? I can't understand. What have I done? Good heavens, we are man and wife, aren't we?"

I made no answer. My heart which had been hot with rage was becoming cold with dread. It seemed to me that I had suffered an outrage on my natural modesty as a human being, a sort of offence against my dignity as a woman.

It was now dark. With my face to the window I could see nothing. The rain was beating against the glass. The sea was booming on the rocks. I wanted to fly, but I felt caged —morally and physically caged.

My husband had lit a cigarette and was walking up and down the sitting-room, apparently trying to think things out. After awhile he approached me, put his hand on my shoulder and said:

"I see how it is. You're tired, and no wonder. You've had a long and exhausting day. Better go to bed. We'll have to be up early."

Glad to escape from his presence I allowed him to lead me to the large bedroom. As I was crossing the threshold he told me to undress and get into bed, and after that he said something about waiting. Then he closed the door softly and I was alone.

THIRTY-SIXTH CHAPTER

THERE was a fire in the bedroom and I sat down in front of it. Many forces were warring within me. I was trying to fix my thoughts and found it difficult to do so.

Some time passed. My husband's man came in with the noiseless step of all such persons, opened one of the portmanteaux and laid out his master's combs and brushes on the dressing table and his sleeping suit on the bed. A maid of the hotel followed him, and taking my own sleeping things out of the top tray of my trunk she laid them out beside my husband's.

"Good-night, my lady," they said in their low voices as they went out on tiptoe.

I hardly heard them. My mind, at first numb, was now going at lightning speed. Brought face to face for the first time with one of the greatest facts of a woman's life I was asking myself why I had not reckoned with it before.

I had not even thought of it. My whole soul had been so much occupied with one great spiritual issue—that I did not love my husband (as I understood love), that my husband did not love me—that I had never once plainly confronted, even in my own mind, the physical fact that is the first condition of matrimony, and nobody had mentioned it to me or even hinted at it.

I could not plead that I did not know of this condition. I was young but I was not a child. I had been brought up in a convent, but a convent is not a nursery. Then why had I not thought of it?

While sitting before the fire, gathering together these dark thoughts, I was in such fear that I was always conscious of my husband's movements in the adjoining room. At one moment there was the jingling of his glass against the decanter, at another moment the smell of his cigarette smoke. From time to time he came to the door and called to me in a sort of husky whisper, asking if I was in bed.

"Don't keep me long, little girl."

I shuddered but made no reply.

At last he knocked softly and said he was coming in. I was still crouching over the fire as he came up behind me.

"Not in bed yet?" he said. "Then I must put you to bed."

Before I could prevent him he had lifted me in his arms, dragged me on to his knee and was pulling down my hair, laughing as he did so, calling me by coarse endearing names and telling me not to fight and struggle.

But the next thing I knew I was back in the sitting-room, where I had switched up the lights, and my husband, whose face was distorted by passion, was blazing out at me.

"What do you mean?" he said. "I'm your husband, am I not? You are my wife, aren't you? What did you marry for? Good heavens, can it be possible that you don't know what the conditions of matrimony are? Is that what comes of being brought up in a convent? But has your father allowed you to marry without. . . . And your Aunt—what in God's name has the woman been doing?"

I crossed towards the smaller bedroom intending to enter it, but my husband intercepted me.

"Don't be a fool," he said, catching at my wrist. "Think of the servants. Think what they'd say. Think what the whole island would say. Do you want to make a laughing-stock of both of us?"

I returned and sat by the table. My husband lit another cigarette. Nervously flicking the ends off with the index finger of his left hand, and speaking quickly, as if the words scorched his lips, he told me I was mistaken if I supposed that he wanted a scene like this. He thought he could spend his time better. I was equally mistaken if I imagined that he had desired our marriage at all. Something quite different might have happened if he could have afforded to please himself.

He had made sacrifices to marry me, too. Perhaps I had not thought of that, but did I suppose a man of his class wanted a person like my father for his father-in-law. And then my Aunt and my cousins—ugh!

The Bishop, too! Was it nothing that a man had been compelled to make all those ridiculous declarations? Children to be brought up Catholics! Wife not to be influenced! Even to keep an open mind himself to all the muss and mummery of the Church!

It wasn't over either. That seedy old "saint" was probably my confessor. Did any rational man want another man to come between him and his wife—knowing all he did and said, and everything about him?

I was heart-sick as I listened to all this. Apparently the moral of it was that if I had been allowed to marry without being instructed in the first conditions of married life my husband had suffered a gross and shocking injustice.

The disgust I felt was choking me. It was horribly humiliating and degrading to see my marriage from my husband's point of view, and when I remembered that I was bound fast to the man who talked to me like this, and that he could claim rights in me, to-night, to-morrow, as long as I lived, until death parted us, a wild impulse of impotent anger at everybody and everything made me drop my head on to the table and burst into tears.

My husband misunderstood this, as he misunderstood everything. Taking my crying for the last remnant of my resistance he put his arms round my shoulders again and renewed his fondling.

"Come, don't let us have any more conjugal scenes," he said. "The people of the hotel will hear us presently, and there will be all sorts of ridiculous rumours. If your family are rather common people you are a different pair of shoes altogether."

He was laughing again, kissing my neck (in spite of my shuddering) and saying:

"You really please me very much, you do indeed, and if they've kept you in ignorance, what matter? Come now, my sweet little woman, we'll soon repair that."

I could bear no more. I *must* speak and I did. Leaping up and facing round on him I told him my side of the story—how I had been married against my will, and had not wanted him any more than he had wanted me; how all my objections had been overruled, all my compunctions borne down; how everybody had been in a conspiracy to compel me, and I had been bought and sold like a slave.

"But you can't go any farther than that," I said. "Between you, you have forced me to marry you, but nobody can force me to obey you, because I won't."

I saw his face grow paler and paler as I spoke, and when I had finished it was ashen-white.

"So that's how it is, is it?" he said, and for some minutes more he tramped about the room, muttering inaudible words, as if trying to account to himself for my conduct. At length he approached me again and said, in the tone of one who thought he was making peace:

"Look here, Mary. I think I understand you at last. You have some other attachment—that's it, I suppose. Oh, don't think I'm blaming you. I may be in the same case myself for all you know to the contrary. But circumstances have been too strong for us and here we are. Well, we're in it, and we've got to make the best of it and why shouldn't we? Lots of people in my class are in the same position, and yet they get along all right. Why can't we do the same? I'll not be too particular. Neither will you. For the rest of our lives let each of us go his and her own way. But that's no reason why we should be strangers exactly. Not on our wedding-day at all events. You're a damned pretty woman and I'm. . . . Well, I'm not an ogre, I suppose. We are man and wife, too. So look here, we won't expect too much affection from each other—but let's stop this fooling and be good friends for a little while anyway. Come, now."

Once more he took hold of me, as if to draw me back, kissing my hands as he did so, but his gross misinterpretation of my resistance and the immoral position he was putting me into were stifling me, and I cried:

"No, I will not. Don't you see that I hate and loathe you?"

There could be no mistaking me this time. The truth had fallen on my husband with a shock. I think it was the last thing his pride had expected. His face became shockingly distorted. But after a moment, recovering himself with a cruel laugh that made my hot blood run cold, he said:

"Nevertheless, you shall do as I wish. You are my wife, and as such you belong to me. The law allows me to compel you and I will."

The words went shrieking through and through me. He was coming towards me with outstretched arms, his teeth set, and his pupils fixed. In the drunkenness of his rage he was laughing brutally.

But all my fear had left me. I felt an almost murderous impulse. I wanted to strike him on the face.

"If you attempt to touch me I will throw myself out of the window," I said.

"No fear of that," he said, catching me quickly in his arms.

"If you do not take your hands off me I'll shriek the house down," I cried.

That was enough. He let me go and dropped back from me. At the next moment I was breathing with a sense of freedom. Without resistance on my husband's part I entered the little bedroom to the left and locked the door behind me.

THIRTY-SEVENTH CHAPTER

Some further time passed. I sat by the fireless grate with my chin in my hand. If the storm outside was still raging I did not hear it. I was listening to the confused sounds that came from the sitting-room.

My husband was pacing to and fro, muttering oaths, knocking against the furniture, breaking things. At one moment there was a crash of glass, as if he had helped himself to brandy and then in his ungovernable passion flung the decanter into the fire grate.

Somebody knocked at the sitting-room. It must have been a waiter, for through the wall I heard the muffled sound of a voice asking if there had been an accident. My husband swore at the man and sent him off. Hadn't he told him not to come until he was rung for?

At length, after half an hour perhaps, my husband knocked at the door of my little room.

"Are you there?" he asked.

I made no answer.

"Open the door."

I sat motionless.

"You needn't be afraid. I'm not going to do anything. I've something to say."

Still I made no reply. My husband went away for a moment and then came back.

"If you are determined not to open the door I must say what I've got to say from here. Are you listening?"

Sitting painfully rigid I answered that I was.

Then he told me that what I was doing would entitle him to annul our marriage—in the eyes of the Church at all events.

If he thought that threat would intimidate me he was mistaken—a wave of secret joy coursed through me.

"It won't matter much to me—I'll take care it won't—but it will be a degrading business for you—invalidity and all that. Are you prepared for it?"

I continued to sit silent and motionless.

"I daresay we shall both be laughed at, but I cannot help that. We can't possibly live together on terms like these."

Another wave of joy coursed through me.

"Anyhow I intend to know before I leave the island how things are to be. I'm not going to take you away until I get some satisfaction. You understand?"

I listened, almost without breathing, but I did not reply.

"I'm think of writing a letter to your father, and sending Hobson with it in the car immediately. Do you hear me?"

"Yes."

"Well, you know what your father is. Unless I'm much mistaken he's not a man to have much patience with your semi-romantic, semi-religious sentiments. Are you quite satisfied?"

"Quite."

"Very well! That's what I'll do, then."

After this there was a period of quiet in which I assumed that my husband was writing his letter. Then I heard a bell ring somewhere in the corridor, and shortly afterwards there was a second voice in the sitting-room, but I could not hear the words that were spoken. I suppose it was Hobson's low voice, for after another short interval of silence there came the thrum and throb of a motorcar and the rumble of india-rubber wheels on the wet gravel of the courtyard in front of the hotel.

Then my husband knocked at my door again.

"I've written that letter and Hobson is waiting to take it.

Your father will probably get it before he goes to bed. It will be a bad break on the festivities he was preparing for the village people. But you are still of the same mind, I suppose?''

I did not speak, but I rose and went over to the window. For some reason difficult to explain, that reference to the festivities had cut me to the quick.

My husband must have been fuming at my apparent indifference, and I felt as if I could see him looking at me, passionate and proud.

''Between the lot of you I think you've done me a great injustice. Have you nothing to say?''

Even then I did not answer.

''All right! As you please.''

A few minutes afterwards I heard the motor car turning and driving away.

The wind had fallen, the waves were rolling into the harbour with that monotonous moan which is the sea's memory of a storm, and a full moon, like a white-robed queen, was riding through a troubled sky.

THIRTY-EIGHTH CHAPTER

The moon had died out; a new day had dawned; the sea was lying as quiet as a sleeping child; far out on the level horizon the sky was crimsoning before the rising sun, and clouds of white sea-gulls were swirling and jabbering above the rocks in the harbour below the house before I lay down to sleep.

I was awakened by a hurried knocking at my door, and by an impatient voice crying:

''Mary! Mary! Get up! Let me in!''

It was Aunt Bridget who had arrived in my husband's automobile. When I opened the door to her she came sailing into the room with her new half-moon bonnet a little awry, as if she had put it on hurriedly in the dim light of early morning, and, looking at me with her cold grey eyes behind their gold-rimmed spectacles, she began to bombard me with mingled ridicule and indignant protest.

''Goodness me, girl, what's all this fuss about? You little simpleton, tell me what has happened!''

She was laughing. I had hardly ever heard Aunt Bridget laugh before. But her vexation soon got the better of her merriment.

"His lordship's letter arrived in the middle of the night and nearly frightened us out of our senses. Your father was for coming away straight, and it would have been worse for you if he had. But I said: 'No, this is work for a woman, I'll go,' and here I am. And now tell me, what in the name of goodness does this ridiculous trouble mean?"

It was hard to say anything on such a subject under such circumstances, especially when so challenged, but Aunt Bridget, without waiting for my reply, proceeded to indicate the substance of my husband's letter.

From this I gathered that he had chosen (probably to save his pride) to set down my resistance to ignorance of the first conditions of matrimony, and had charged my father first and Aunt Bridget afterwards with doing him a shocking injustice in permitting me to be married to him without telling me what every girl who becomes a wife ought to know.

"But, good gracious," said my Aunt Bridget, "who would have imagined you *didn't* know. I thought every girl in the world knew before she put up her hair and came out of short frocks. My Betsy did, I'm sure of that. And to think that you—you whom we thought so cute, so cunning. . . . Mary O'Neill, I'm ashamed of you. I really, really am! Why, you goose" (Aunt Bridget was again trying to laugh), "how did you suppose the world went on?"

The coarse ridicule of what was supposed to be my maidenly modesty cut me like a knife, but I could not permit myself to explain, so my Aunt Bridget ran on talking.

"I see how it has been. It's the fault of that Reverend Mother at the convent. What sort of a woman is she? Is she a woman at all, I wonder, or only a piece of stucco that ought to be put up in a church corner! To think she could have you nine years and never say one word about. . . . Well, well! What has she been doing with you? Talking about the mysteries, I suppose—prayers and retreats and novenas, and the spiritual bridegroom and the rest of it, while all the while. . . . But you must put the convent out of your head, my girl. You are a married woman now. You've got to think of your husband, and a husband isn't a spiritual bridegroom I can tell you. He's flesh and blood, that's what a husband is, and you can't expect *him* to spend his time talking about eternity and the rosary. Not on his wedding-day, anyway."

I was hot in my absurd embarrassment, and I dare say my face was scarlet, but Aunt Bridget showed me no mercy.

"The way you have behaved is too silly for anything . . . It really is. A husband's a husband, and a wife's a wife. The wife has to obey her husband. Of course she has. Every wife has to. Some don't like it. I can't say that I liked it very much myself. But to think of anybody objecting. Why, it's shocking! Nobody ever heard of such a thing."

I must have flushed up to my forehead, for I became conscious that in my Aunt Bridget's eyes there had been a kind of indecency in my conduct.

"But, come," she said, "we must be sensible. It's timidity, that's what it is. I was a little timid myself when I was first married, but I soon got over it. Once get over your timidity and you will be all right. Sakes alive, yes, you'll be as happy as the day is long, and before this time to-morrow you'll wonder what on earth you made all this fuss about."

I tried to say that what she predicted could never be, because I did not love my husband, and therefore . . . but my Aunt Bridget broke in on me, saying:

"Mary O'Neill, don't be a fool. Your maiden days are over now, and you ought to know what your husband will do if you persist."

I jumped at the thought that she meant he would annul our marriage, but that was not what she was thinking of.

"He'll find somebody else—that's what he'll do. Serve you right, too. You'll only have yourself to blame for it. Perhaps you think you'll be able to do the same, but you won't. Women can't. He'll be happy enough, and you'll be the only one to suffer, so don't make a fool of yourself. Accept the situation. You may not like your husband too much. I can't say I liked the Colonel particularly. He took snuff, and no woman in the world could keep him in clean pocket handkerchiefs. But when a sensible person has got something at stake, she puts up with things. And that's what you must do. He who wants fresh eggs must raise his own chickens, you know."

Aunt Bridget ran on for some time longer, telling me of my father's anger, which was not a matter for much surprise, seeing how he had built himself upon my marriage, and how he had expected that I should have a child, a son, to carry on the family.

"Do you mean to disappoint him after all he has done for you? It would be too silly, too stupid. You'd be the laughing-stock of the whole island. So get up and get dressed and be ready and willing to go with his lordship when he sails by this afternoon's steamer."

"I can't," I said.

"You can't? You mean you won't?"

"Very well, Auntie, I won't."

At that Aunt Bridget stormed at me for several minutes, telling me that if my stubborn determination not to leave the island with my husband meant that I intended to return home she might inform me at once that I was not wanted there and I need not come.

"I've enough on my hands in that house already, what with Betsy unmarried, and your father doing nothing for her, and that nasty Nessy MacLeod making up to him. You ungrateful minx! You are ruining everything! After all I've done for you too! But no matter! If you *will* make your bed I shall take care that you lie on it."

With that, and the peak of her half-moon bonnet almost dancing over her angry face, Aunt Bridget flounced out of my room.

Half an hour afterwards, when I went into the sitting-room, I found my father's advocate, Mr. Curphy, waiting for me. He looked down at me with an indulgent and significant smile, which brought the colour rushing back to my face, put me to sit by his side, touched my arm with one of his large white clammy hands, stroked his long brown beard with the other, and then in the half-reproving tone which a Sunday-school teacher might have used to a wayward child, he began to tell me what the consequences would be if I persisted in my present conduct.

They would be serious. The law was very clear on marital rights. If a wife refused to live with her husband, except on a plea of cruelty or something equally plausible, he could apply to the court and compel her to do so; and if she declined, if she removed herself from his abode, or having removed, refused to return, the Court might punish her—it might even imprison her.

"So you see, the man is the top dog in a case like this, my dear, and he can compel the woman to obey him."

"Do you mean," I said, "that he can use force to compel her?"

"Reasonable force, yes. I think that's so. And quite right, too, when you come to think of it. The woman has entered into a serious contract, and it is the duty of the law to see that she fulfills the conditions of it.''

I remembered how little I had known of the conditions of the contract I had entered into, but I was too heart-sick and ashamed to say anything about that.

''Aw yes, that's so,'' said the advocate, ''force, reasonable force! You may say it puts a woman in a worse position as a wife than she would be if she were a mistress. That's true, but it's the law, and once a woman has married a man, the only escape from this condition of submission is—imprisonment.''

''Then I would rather that—a thousand times rather,'' I said, for I was hot with anger and indignation.

Again the advocate smiled indulgently, patted my arm, and answered me as if I were a child.

''Tut, tut, my dear, tut, tut! You've made a marriage that is founded on suitability of position, property and education, and everything will come right by and by. Don't act on a fit of pique or spleen, and so destroy your happiness, and that of everybody about you. Think of your father. Remember what he has done to make this marriage. . . . I may tell you that he has paid forty thousand pounds to discharge your husband's debts and undertaken responsibility for an allowance of six thousand a year beside. Do you want him to lose all that money?''

I was so sick with disgust at hearing this that I could not speak, and the advocate, who, in his different way, was as dead to my real feelings as my husband had been, went on to say:

''Come, be reasonable. You may have suffered some slight, some indignity. No doubt you have. Your husband is proud and he has peculiarities of temper which we have all to make allowances for. But even if you could establish a charge of cruelty against him and so secure a separation—which you can't—what good would that do you? None at all—worse than none! The financial arrangements would remain the same. Your father would be a frightful loser. And what would you be? A married widow! The worst condition in the world for a woman—especially if she is young and attractive, and subject to temptations. Ask anybody who knows—anybody.''

I felt as if I would suffocate with shame.

"Come now," said the advocate in his superior way, taking my hand as if he were going to lead me like a child to my husband, "let us put an end to this little trouble. His lordship is downstairs and he has consented—kindly and generously consented—to wait an hour for your answer. But he must leave the island by the afternoon steamer, and if . . ."

"Then tell him he must leave it without me," I said, as well as I could for the anger that was choking me.

The advocate looked steadily into my face. I think he understood the situation at last.

"You mean that—really and truly mean it?" he asked.

"I do," I answered, and unable to say or hear any more without breaking out on him altogether I left the room.

THIRTY-NINTH CHAPTER

Down to this moment I had put on a brave front though my very heart had been trembling; but now I felt that all the weight of law, custom, parental authority and even religion was bearing me down, down, down, and unless help came I must submit in the long run.

I was back in the small bedroom, with my hot forehead against the cold glass of the window, looking out yet seeing nothing, when somebody knocked at the door, softly almost timidly. It was Father Dan, and the sight of his dear face, broken up with emotion, was the same to me as the last plank of a foundering ship to a sailor drowning at sea.

My heart was so full that, though I knew I ought not, I threw my arms about his neck and burst into a flood of tears. The good old priest did not put me away. He smoothed my drooping head and patted my shoulders and in his sweet and simple way he tried to comfort me.

"Don't cry! Don't worry! It will be all right in the end, my child."

There was something almost grotesque in his appearance. Under his soft clerical outdoor hat he was wearing his faded old cassock, as if he had come away hurriedly at a sudden call. I could see what had happened—my family had sent him to reprove me and remonstrate with me.

He sat on a chair by my bed and I knelt on the floor at his feet, just as my mother used to do when I was a child and she was making her confession. Perhaps he thought of that at the same moment as myself, for the golden light of my mother's memory lay always about him. For some moments we did not speak. I think we were both weeping.

At length I tried to tell him what had happened—hiding nothing, softening nothing, speaking the simple and naked truth. I found it impossible to do so. My odd-sounding voice was not like my own, and even my words seemed to be somebody else's. But Father Dan understood everything.

"I know! I know!" he said, and then, to my great relief, interrupting my halting explanations, he gave his own interpretation of my husband's letter.

There was a higher love and there was a lower love and both were necessary to God's plans and purposes. But the higher love must come first, or else the lower one would seem to be cruel and gross and against nature.

Nature was kind to a young girl. Left to itself it awakened her sex very gently. First with love, which came to her like a whisper in a dream, like the touch of an angel on her sleeping eyelids, so that when she awoke to the laws of life the mysteries of sex did not startle or appal her.

But sex in me had been awakened rudely and ruthlessly. Married without love I had been suddenly confronted by the lower passion. What wonder that I had found it brutal and barbarous?

"That's it, my child! That's it! I know! I know!"

Then he began to blame himself for everything, saying it was all his fault and that he should have held out longer. When he saw how things stood between me and my husband he should have said to my father, to the Bishop, and to the lawyers, notwithstanding all their bargainings: "This marriage must not go on. It will lead to disaster. It begins to end badly."

"But now it is all over, my child, and there's no help for it."

I think the real strength of my resistance to Aunt Bridget's coarse ridicule and the advocate's callous remonstrance must have been the memory of my husband's threat when he talked about the possible annulment of our marriage. The thought of that came back to me now, and half afraid, half ashamed, with a fluttering of the heart, I tried to mention it.

"Is there no way out?" I asked.

"What way can there be?" said Father Dan. "God knows I know what pressure was put upon you; but you are married, you have made your vows, you have given your promises.

That's all the world sees or cares about, and in the eyes of the law and the Church you are responsible for all that has happened."

With my head still buried in Father Dan's cassock I got it out at last.

"But annulment! Isn't that possible—under the circumstances?" I asked.

The good old priest seemed to be too confused to speak for a moment. Then he explained that what I hoped for was quite out of the question.

"I don't say that in the history of the Church marriages have not been annulled on equally uncertain grounds, but in this case the civil law would require proof—something to justify nullity. Failing that there would have to be collusion either on one side or both, and that is not possible—not to you, my child, not to the daughter of your mother, that dear saint who suffered so long and was silent."

More than ever now I felt like a ship-broken man with the last plank sinking under him. The cold mysterious dread of my husband was creeping back, and the future of my life with him stood before me with startling vividness. In spite of all my struggling and fighting of the night before I saw myself that very night, the next night, and the next, and every night and day of my life thereafter, a victim of the same sickening terror.

"Must I submit, then?" I said.

Father Dan smoothed my head and told me in his soft voice that submission was the lot of all women. It always had been so in the history of the world, and perhaps it always would be.

"Remember the Epistle we read in church yesterday morning: 'Wives submit yourselves to your husbands.' "

With a choking sensation in my throat I asked if he thought I ought to go away with my husband when he left the island by the afternoon steamer.

"I see no escape from it, my poor child. They sent me to reprove you. I can't do that, but neither can I encourage you to resist. It would be wrong. It would be cruel. It would only lead you into further trouble."

My mouth felt parched, but I contrived to say:

"Then you can hold out no hope for me?"

"God knows I can't."

"Although I do not love this man I must live with him as his wife?"

"It is hard, very hard, but there seems to be no help for it."

I rose to my feet, and went back to the window. A wild impulse of rebellion was coming over me.

"I shall feel like a bad woman," I said.

"Don't say that," said Father Dan. "You are married to the man anyway."

"All the same I shall feel like my husband's mistress—his married mistress, his harlot."

Father Dan was shocked, and the moment the words were out of my mouth I was more frightened than I had ever been before, for something within seemed to have forced them out of me.

When I recovered possession of my senses Father Dan, nervously fumbling with the silver cross that hung over his cassock, was talking of the supernatural effect of the sacrament of marriage. It was God Who joined people together, and whom God joined together no man might put asunder. No circumstances either, no trial or tribulation. Could it be thought that a bond so sacred, so indissoluble, was ever made without good effect? No, the Almighty had His own ways with His children, and this great mystery of holy wedlock was one of them.

"So don't lose heart, my child. Who knows what may happen yet? God works miracles now just as He did in the old days. You may come . . . yes, you may come to love your husband, and then—then all will be well."

Suddenly out of my despair and my defiance a new thought came to me. It came with the memory of the emotion I had experienced during the marriage service, and it thrilled me through and through.

"Father Dan?" I said, with a nervous cry, for my heart was fluttering again.

"What is it, my child?"

It was hard to say what I was thinking about, but with a great effort I stammered it out at last. I should be willing to leave the island with my husband, and live under the same roof with him, and bear his name, so that there might be no trouble, or scandal, and nobody except ourselves might ever know that there was anything dividing us, any difference of any kind between us, if he, on his part, would promise—firmly and faithfully promise—that unless and until I came to love him he would never claim my submission as a wife.

While I spoke I hardly dared to look at Father Dan, fearing he would shake his head again, perhaps reprove me, perhaps laugh at me. But his eyes which had been moist began to sparkle and smile.

"You mean that?" he asked.

"Yes."

"And you will go away with him on that condition?"

"Yes, yes."

"Then he must agree to it."

The pure-minded old priest saw no difficulties, no dangers, no risks of breakdown in my girlish scheme. Already my husband had got all he had bargained for. He had got my father's money in exchange for his noble name, and if he wanted more, if he wanted the love of his wife, let him earn it, let him win it.

"That's only right, only fair. It will be worth winning, too—better worth winning than all your father's gold and silver ten times over. I can tell him that much anyway."

He had risen to his feet in his excitement, the simple old priest with his pure heart and his beautiful faith in me.

"And you, my child, you'll try to love him in return—promise you will."

A shiver ran through me when Father Dan said that—a sense of the repugnance I felt for my husband almost stifled me.

"Promise me," said Father Dan, and though my face must have been scarlet, I promised him.

"That's right. That alone will make him a better man. He may be all that people say, but who can measure the miraculous influence of a good woman?"

He was making for the door.

"I must go downstairs now and speak to your husband. But he'll agree. Why shouldn't he? I know he's afraid of a public scandal, and if he attempts to refuse I'll tell him that . . . But no, that will be quite unnecessary. Good-bye, my child! If I don't come back you'll know that everything has been settled satisfactorily. You'll be happy yet. I'm sure you will. Ah, what did I say about the mysterious power of that solemn and sacred sacrament? Good-bye!"

I meant what I had said. I meant to do what I had promised. God knows I did. But does a woman ever know her own heart? Or is heaven alone the judge of it?

At four o'clock that afternoon my husband left Ellan for England. I went with him.

FORTIETH CHAPTER

Having made my bargain I set myself to fulfil the conditions of it. I had faithfully promised to try to love my husband and I prepared to do so.

Did not love require that a wife should look up to and respect and even reverence the man she had married? I made up my mind to do that by shutting my eyes to my husband's obvious faults and seeing only his better qualities.

What disappointments were in store for me! What crushing and humiliating disillusionments!

On the night of our arrival in London we put up at a fashionable hotel in a quiet but well-known part of the West-end, which is inhabited chiefly by consulting physicians and celebrated surgeons. Here, to my surprise, we were immediately discovered, and lines of visitors waited upon my husband the following morning.

I thought they were his friends, and a ridiculous little spurt of pride came to me from heaven knows where with the idea that my husband must be a man of some importance in the metropolis.

But I discovered they were his creditors, money-lenders and bookmakers, to whom he owed debts of "honour" which he had been unable or unwilling to disclose to my father and his advocate.

One of my husband's visitors was a pertinacious little man who came early and stayed late. He was a solicitor, and my husband was obviously in some fear of him. The interviews between them, while they were closeted together morning after morning in one of our two sitting-rooms, were long and apparently unpleasant, for more than once I caught the sound of angry words on both sides, with oaths and heavy blows upon the table.

But towards the end of the week, my husband's lawyer arrived in London, and after that the conversations became more pacific.

One morning, as I sat writing a letter in the adjoining room, I heard laughter, the popping of corks, the jingling of glasses, and the drinking of healths, and I judged that the difficult and disagreeable business had been concluded.

At the close of the interview I heard the door opened and my husband going into the outer corridor to see his visitors to the lift, and then something prompted me—God alone knows what—to step into the room they had just vacated.

It was thick with tobacco smoke. An empty bottle of champagne (with three empty wine glasses) was on the table, and on a desk by the window were various papers, including a sheet of foolscap which bore a seal and several signatures, and a thick packet of old letters bound together with a piece of purple ribbon.

Hardly had I had time to recognise these documents when my husband returned to the room, and by the dark expression of his face I saw instantly that he thought I had looked at them.

"No matter!" he said, without any preamble. "I might as well tell you at once and have done with it."

He told me. The letters were his. They had been written to a woman whom he had promised to marry, and he had had to buy them back from her. Although for three years he had spent a fortune on the creature she had shown him no mercy. Through her solicitor, who was a scoundrel, she had threatened him, saying in plain words that if he married anybody else she would take proceedings against him immediately. That was why, in spite of the storm, we had to come up to London on the day after our wedding.

"Now you know," said my husband. "Look here" (holding out the sheet of foolscap), "five thousand pounds—that's the price I've had to pay for marrying."

I can give no idea of the proud imperiousness and the impression of injury with which my husband told his brutal story. But neither can I convey a sense of the crushing shame with which I listened to it. There was not a hint of any consciousness on his part of my side of the case. Not a suggestion of the clear fact that the woman he had promised to marry had been paid off by money which had come through me. Not a thought of the humiliation he had imposed upon his wife in dragging her up to London at the demand of his cast-off mistress.

When my husband had finished speaking I could not utter a word. I was afraid that my voice would betray the anger that was boiling in me. But I was also degraded to the very dust in my own eyes, and to prevent an outburst of hysterical tears I ran back to my room and hid my face in my pillow.

What was the good of trying to make myself in love with a man who was separated from me by a moral chasm that could never be passed? What was the good? What was the good?

FORTY-FIRST CHAPTER

But next morning, having had time to think things out in my simple and ignorant way, I tried to reconcile myself to my position. Remembering what Aunt Bridget had said, both before my marriage and after it, about the different moralities of men and women, I told myself I had placed my standard too high.

Perhaps a husband was not a superior being, to be regarded with respect and reverence, but a sort of grown-up child whom it was the duty of a wife to comfort, coax, submit to and serve.

I determined to do this. Still clinging to the hope of falling in love with my husband, I set myself to please him by every means within my power, even to the length of simulating sentiments which I did not feel.

But what a task I was setting myself! What a steep and stony Calvary I was attempting to climb!

After the degrading business with the other woman had been concluded I thought we should have left England immediately on the honeymoon tour which my husband had mapped out for us, but he told me that would not be convenient and we must remain in London a little longer. We stayed six weeks altogether, and never did a young wife pass a more cheerless and weary time.

I had no friends of my own within reach, and to my deep if secret mortification no woman of my husband's circle called upon me. But a few of his male friends were constantly with us, including Mr. Eastcliff, who had speedily followed us from Ellan, and a Mr. Vivian, who, though the brother of a Cabinet Minister, seemed to me a very vain and vapid person, with the eyes of a mole, a vacant smile, a stupid expression, an abrupt way of speaking through his teeth, and a shrill voice which gave the impression of screeching against the wind.

With these two men, and others of a similar kind, we passed many hours of nearly every day, lunching with them, dining with them, walking with them, driving with them, and above all playing bridge with them in one of our sitting rooms in the hotel.

I knew nothing of the game to begin with, never having touched a card in my life, but in accordance with the theories which I believed to be right and the duties I had imposed upon myself, I took a hand with my husband when he could find nobody better to be his partner.

The results were very disheartening. In spite of my desire to please I was slow to learn, and my husband's impatience with my mistakes, which confused and intimidated me, led to some painful humiliations. First he laughed, next he sneered, then he snapped me up in the midst of my explanations and apologies, and finally, at a moment of loss, he broke out on me with brutal derision, saying he had never had much opinion of my intellect, but was now quite sure that I had no more brains than a rabbit and could not say Boo to a goose.

One day when we were alone, and he was lying on the couch with his vicious little terrier by his side, I offered to sing to him. Remembering how my voice had been praised, I thought it would be pleasant to my husband to see that there was something I really could do. But nine years in a convent had left me with next to no music but memories of the long-breathed harmonies of some of the beautiful masses of our Church, and hardly had I begun on these when my husband cried:

"Oh, stop, stop, for heaven's sake stop, or I shall think we're attending a funeral."

Another day I offered to read to him. The Reverend Mother used to say I was the best reader she had ever heard, but perhaps it was not altogether my husband's fault if he formed a different opinion. And indeed I cannot but think that the holy saints themselves would have laughed if they had heard me reading aloud, in the voice and intonation which I had assumed for the meditations of St. Francis of Assisi, the mystic allusions to "certs," and "bookies," and "punters," and "evens," and "scratchings," which formed the substance of the sporting journals that were my husband's only literature.

"Oh, stop it, stop it," he cried again. "You read the 'Winning Post' as if it were the Book of Revelation."

As time passed the gulf that separated me from my husband became still greater. If I could have entertained him with any kind of gossip we might have got on better. But I had no conversation that interested him, and he had little or none that I could pretend to understand. He loved the town; I loved the country; he loved the night and the blaze of electric lights; I loved the morning and the sweetness of the sun.

At the bottom of my heart I knew that his mind was common, low and narrow, and that his tastes were gross and vulgar, but I was determined to conquer the repulsion I felt for him.

It was impossible. If I could have struck one spark from the flint of his heart the relations between us might have been different. If his look could have met my look in a single glance of understanding I could have borne with his impatience and struggled on.

But nothing of this kind ever happened, and when one dreary night after grumbling at the servants, cursing his fate and abusing everybody and everything, he put on his hat and went out saying he had "better have married Lena [the other woman] after all," for in that case he would have had "some sort of society anyway," the revulsion I had felt on the night of my marriage came sweeping over me like a wave of the sea, and I asked myself again, "What's the good? What's the good?"

FORTY-SECOND CHAPTER

Nevertheless next day I found myself taking my husband's side against myself.

If he had sacrificed anything in order to marry me it was my duty to make it up to him.

I resolved that I *should* make it up to him. I would study my husband's likes and dislikes in every little thing. I would share in his pleasures and enter into his life. I would show him that a wife was something other and better than any hired woman in the world, and that when she cast in her lot with her husband it was for his own sake only and not for any fortune he could spend on her.

"Yes, yes, that's what I'll do," I thought, and I became more solicitous of my husband's happiness than if I had really and truly loved him.

A woman would smile at the efforts which I made in my inexperience to make my husband forget his cast-off mistress, and indeed some of them were very childish.

The first was a ridiculous failure.

My husband's birthday was approaching and I wished to make him a present. It was difficult to know what to select, for I knew little or nothing of his tastes or wants; but walking one day in a street off Oxford Street I saw, in the window of a shop for the sale of objects of ecclesiastical *vertu,* among crosses and crucifixes and rosaries, a little ivory ink-stand and paper-holder, which was surmounted by a figure of the Virgin.

I cannot for the life of me conceive why I thought this would be a suitable present for my husband, except that the face of Our Lady was so young, so sweet, so beautiful, and so exquisitely feminine that it seemed impossible that any man in the world should not love her. But however that might be I bought her, and carrying her home in a cab, I set her on my husband's desk without a word, and then stood by, like the mother of Moses, to watch the result.

There was no result—at first at all events. My husband was several hours in the room with my treasure without appearing to be aware of its presence. But towards evening his two principal friends came to play bridge with him, and then, from the ambush of my own apartments, I heard the screechy voice of Mr. Vivian saying:

"Dash it all, Jimmy, you don't say you're going to be a Pape?"

"Don't fret yourself, old fellow," replied my husband. "That's my wife's little flutter. Dare say the poor fool has had to promise her priest to make me a 'vert.' "

My next experiment was perhaps equally childish but certainly more successful.

Seeing that my husband was fond of flowers, and was rarely without a rose in his buttonhole, I conceived the idea of filling his room with them in honour of his birthday. With this view I got up very early, before anybody in the hotel was stirring, and hurried off to Covent Garden, through the empty and echoing streets, while the air of London was fresh with the breath of morning and the big city within its high-built walls seemed to dream of the green fields beyond.

I arrived at the busy and noisy square just as the waggons were rolling in from the country with huge crates of red and white roses, bright with the sunshine and sparkling with the dew. Then buying the largest and loveliest and costliest bunch of them (a great armful, as much as I could hold), I hurried back to the hotel and set them in vases and glasses in every part of my husband's room—his desk, his sideboard, his mantelpiece, and above all his table, which a waiter was laying for breakfast—until the whole place was like a bridal bower.

"Ah, this is something like," I heard my husband say as he came out of his bedroom an hour or two afterwards with his vicious terrier at his heels.

I heard no more until he had finished breakfast, and then, while drawing on his gloves for his morning walk, he said to the waiter, who was clearing the table,

"Tell your manageress I am much obliged to her for the charming flowers with which she has decorated my room this morning."

"But it wasn't the manageress, my lord," said the waiter.

"Then who was it?"

"It was her . . . her ladyship," said the waiter.

"O-oh!" said my husband in a softer, if more insinuating tone, and a few minutes afterwards he went out whistling.

God knows that was small reward for the trouble I had taken, but I was so uplifted by the success of my experiment that I determined to go farther, and when towards evening of the same day a group of my husband's friends came to tell him that they had booked a box at a well-known musical comedy theatre, I begged to be permitted to join them.

"Nonsense, my dear! Brompton Oratory would suit you better," said my husband, chucking me under the chin.

But I persisted in my importunities, and at length Mr. Eastcliff said:

"Let her come. Why shouldn't she?"

"Very well," said my husband, pinching my cheek. "As you please. But if you don't like it don't blame *me.*"

It did not escape me that as a result of my change of front my husband had risen in his own esteem, and that he was behaving towards me as one who thought he had conquered my first repugnance, or perhaps triumphantly ridden over it. But in my simplicity I was so fixed in my determination to make my husband forget the loss of his mistress that I had no fear of his familiarities and no misgivings about his mistakes.

All that was to come later, with a fresh access of revulsion and disgust.

FORTY-THIRD CHAPTER

I HAD seen enough of London by this time to know that the dresses which had been made for me at home were by no means the *mode;* but after I had put on the best-fitting of my simple quaker-like costumes with a string of the family pearls about my neck and another about my head, not all the teaching of the good women of the convent could prevent me from thinking that my husband and his friends would have no reason to be ashamed of me.

We were a party of six in all, whereof I was the only woman, and we occupied a large box on the first tier near the stage, a position of prominence which caused me a certain embarrassment, when, as happened at one moment of indefinable misery, the opera glasses of the people in the dress-circle and stalls were turned in our direction.

I cannot say that the theatre impressed me. Certainly the building itself did not do so, although it was beautifully decorated in white and gold, for I had seen the churches of Rome, and in my eyes they were much more gorgeous.

Neither did the audience impress me, for though I had never before seen so many well-dressed people in one place, I thought too many of the men, when past middle life, seemed fat and overfed, and too many of the women, with their plump arms and bare shoulders, looked as if they thought of nothing but what to eat and what to put on.

Nor did the performers impress me, for though when the curtain rose, disclosing the stage full of people, chiefly girls, in delicate and beautiful toilettes, I thought I had never before seen so many lovely and happy faces, after a while, when the faces fell into repose, I thought they were not really lovely and not really happy, but hard and strained and painful, as if life had been very cruel.

And, above all, I was not impressed by the play, for I thought, in my ignorance of such productions, that I had never heard anything so frivolous and foolish, and more than once I found myself wondering whether my good nuns, if they could have been present, would not have concluded that the whole company had taken leave of their senses.

There was, however, one thing which did impress me, and that was the leading actor. It was a woman, and when she first came on to the stage I thought I had never in my life seen anybody so beautiful, with her lovely soft round figure, her black eyes, her red lips, her pearly white teeth, and a smile so sunny that it had the effect of making everybody in the audience smile with her.

But the strange thing was—I could not account for it—that after a few minutes I thought her extremely ugly and repellent, for her face seemed to be distorted by malice and envy and hatred and nearly every other bad passion.

Nevertheless she was a general favourite, for not only was she applauded before she did anything, but everything she said, though it was sometimes very silly, was accompanied by a great deal of laughter, and everything she sang, though her voice was no great matter, was followed by a chorus of applause.

Seeing this, and feeling that her appearance had caused a flutter of interest in the box behind me, I laughed and applauded also, in accordance with the plan I had prepared for myself, of sharing my husband's pleasures and entering into his life, although at the bottom of my heart I really thought the joy was not very joyful or the mirth very merry.

This went on for nearly an hour, and then a strange thing happened. I was leaning forward on the velvet barrier of the box in front of me, laughing and clapping my hands with the rest, when all at once I became aware that the lady had wheeled about, and, walking down the stage in the direction of our box, was looking boldly back at me.

I could not at first believe it to be so, and even now I cannot say whether it was something in her face, or something whispered at my back which flashed it upon my mind that this was the woman my husband ought to have married, the woman whose place I had taken, the woman of the foolscap document and the letters in the purple ribbon.

After that I could play my poor little part no longer, and though I continued to lean on the yellow velvet of the barrier in front of me I dropped my eyes as often as that woman was on the stage, and hoped and prayed for the end of the performance.

It came at length with a crash of instruments and voices, and a few minutes afterwards my husband and I were in the cab on our way back to the hotel.

I was choking with mingled anger and shame—anger at my husband for permitting me to come to a place in which I could be exposed to a public affront from his cast-off mistress, shame at the memory of the pitiful scheme for entering into his life which had fallen to such a welter of wreck and ruin.

But my husband himself was only choking with laughter.

"It was as good as a play," he said. "Upon my soul it was! I never saw anything funnier in the whole course of my life."

That served him, repeated again and again, until we reached the hotel, when he ordered a bottle of wine to be sent upstairs, and then shook with suppressed laughter as we went up in the lift.

Coming to our floor I turned towards my bedroom, wishing to be alone with my outraged feelings, but my husband drew me into one of our sitting-rooms, telling me he had something to say.

He put me to sit in an arm-chair, threw off his overcoat, lit a cigarette, as well as he could for the spurts and gusts of his laughter, and then, standing back to the fire-place, with one hand in his pocket and his coat-tail over his arm. he told me the cause of his merriment.

"I don't mind telling you that was Lena," he said. "The good-looking girl in the scarlet dress and the big diamonds. She spotted me the moment she stepped on to the stage. Must have guessed who you were, too. Did you see how she looked at you? Thought I had brought you there to walk over her. I'm sure she did!"

There was another gust of laughter and then—

"She'd been going about saying I had married an old frump for the sake of her fortune, and when she saw that you could wipe her off the face of the earth without a gown that was worth wearing, she was ready to die with fury."

There was another gust of laughter through the smoke that was spurting from his mouth and then—

"And you, too, my dear! Laughing and applauding! She thought you were trying to crow over her! On her own particular barn-door, too! Upon my soul, it was too amusing. I wonder she didn't throw something at you. She's like that when she's in her tantrums."

The waiter came in with the wine and my husband poured out a glass for me.

"Have a drink. No? Well, here's to your health, my dear . . . I can't get over it. I really can't. Lena's too funny for anything. Why, what else do you think she's been saying? She's been saying I'll come back to her yet. Yes, 'I'll give him six months to come crawling back to me,' she said to Eastcliff and Vivian and some of the other fellows at the Club. Wonder if she thinks so now? . . . I wonder?"

He threw away his cigarette, drank another glass of the wine, came close up to me and said in a lower tone, which made my skin creep as with cold,

"Whether she's right or wrong depends on you, though."

"On me?"

"Why, yes, of course. That's only natural. One may have all the goodwill in the world, but a man's a man, you know."

I felt my lips quivering with anger, and in an effort to control myself I rose to go, but my husband drew me back into my chair and sat on the arm of it.

"Don't go yet. By the way, dear, I've never thanked you for the beautiful flowers with which you decorated my room this morning. Charming! But I always knew you would soon come round to it."

"Come round to what?" I said, but it was just as if somebody else were speaking.

"*You* know. Of course you know. When that simple old priest proposed that ridiculous compact I agreed, but I knew quite well that it would soon break down. Not on my side, though. Why should it? A man can afford to wait. But I felt sure you would soon tire of your resistance. And you have, haven't you? Oh, I'm not blind. I've seen what's been going on, though I've said nothing about it."

Again I tried to rise, and again my husband held me to my seat, saying:

"Don't be ashamed. There's no reason for that. You were rather hard on me, you know, but I'm going to forget all about it. Why shouldn't I? I've got the loveliest little woman in the world, so I mean to meet her half way, and she's going to get over her convent-bred ideas and be my dear little darling wife. Now isn't she?"

I could have died of confusion and the utter degradation of shame. To think that my poor efforts to please him, my vain attempts to look up to him and reverence him, my bankrupt appeals to the spiritual woman in me that I might bring myself to love him, as I thought it was my duty to do, should have been perverted by his gross and vulgar mind into overtures to the animal man in him—this was more than I could bear. I felt the tears gushing to my eyes, but I kept them back, for my self-pity was not so strong as my wrath.

I rose this time without being aware of his resistance.

"Let me go to bed," I said.

"Certainly! Most certainly, my dear, but . . ."

"Let me go to bed," I said again, and at the next moment I stepped into my room.

He did not attempt to follow me. I saw in a mirror in front what was taking place behind me.

My husband was standing where I had left him with a look first of amazement and then of rage.

"I can't understand you," he said. "Upon my soul I can't! There isn't a man in the world who could."

After that he strode into his own bedroom and clashed the door after him.

"Oh, what's the good?" I thought again.

It was impossible to make myself in love with my husband. It was no use trying.

FORTY-FOURTH CHAPTER

I MUST leave it to those who know better than I do the way to read the deep mysteries of a woman's heart, to explain how it came to pass that the only result of this incident was to make me sure that if we remained in London much longer my husband would go back to the other woman, and to say why (seeing that I did not love him) I should have become feverishly anxious to remove him from the range of this temptation.

Yet so it was, for the very next morning, I wrote to my father saying I had been unwell and begging him to use his influence with my husband to set out on the Egyptian trip without further delay.

My father's answer was prompt. What he had read between the lines of my letter I do not know; what he said was this—

"Daughter—Certainly! I am writing to son-in-law telling him to quit London quick. I guess you've been too long there already. And while you are away you can draw on me yourself for as much as you please, for where it is a matter of money you must never let nobody walk over you.

Yours—&c."

The letter to my husband produced an immediate result. Within twenty-four hours, the telephone was at work with inquiries about trains and berths on steamers; and within a week we were on our way to Marseilles to join the ship that was to take us to Port Said.

Our state-rooms were on the promenade deck of the steamer with a passage-way between them. This admitted of entirely separate existences, which was well, for knowing or guessing my share in our altered arrangements, my husband had become even more morose than before, and no conversation could be sustained between us.

He spent the greater part of his time in his state-room, grumbling at the steward, abusing his valet, beating his bad-tempered terrier and cursing the luck that had brought him on this senseless voyage.

More than ever now I felt the gulf that divided us. I could not pass one single hour with him in comfort. My life was becoming as cold as an empty house, and I was beginning to regret the eagerness with which I had removed my husband from a scene in which he had at least lived the life of a rational creature, when an unexpected event brought me a thrill of passing pleasure.

Our seats in the saloon were at the top of the doctor's table, and the doctor himself was a young Irishman of three or four-and-twenty, as bright and breezy as a March morning and as racy of the soil as new-cut peat.

Hearing that I was from Ellan he started me by asking if by chance I knew Martin Conrad.

"Martin Conrad?" I repeated, feeling (I hardly knew why) as if a rosy veil were falling over my face and neck.

"Yes, Mart Conrad, as we call him. The young man who has gone out as doctor with Lieutenant . . . .'s expedition to the South Pole?"

A wave of tender feeling from my childhood came surging up to my throat and I said:

"He was the first of my boy friends—in fact the only one."

The young doctor's eyes sparkled and he looked as if he wanted to throw down his soup-spoon, jump up, and grasp me by both hands.

"God bless me, is that so?" he said.

It turned out that Martin and he had been friends at Dublin University. They had worked together, "roomed" together, and taken their degrees at the same time.

"So you know Mart? Lord alive, the way things come out!"

It was easy to see that Martin was not only his friend but his hero. He talked of him with a passionate love and admiration with which men, whatever they feel, rarely speak of each other.

Martin was the salt of the earth. He was the finest fellow and the staunchest friend and the bravest-hearted chap that walked under the stars of God.

"The greatest chum I have in the world, too, and by the Holy Immaculate Mother I'm destroyed at being away from him."

It was like music to hear him speak. A flood of joy went sweeping through me at every word of praise he gave to Martin. And yet—I cannot explain why, unless it was the woman in me, the Irish-woman, or something like it—but I began to depreciate Martin, in order to "hoosh" him on, so that he might say more on the same subject.

"Then he *did* take his degree," I said. "He was never very clever at his lessons, I remember, and I heard that he was only just able to scrape through his examinations."

The young doctor fell to my bait like a darling. With a flaming face and a nervous rush of racy words which made me think that if I closed my eyes I should be back on the steps of the church in Rome talking to Martin himself, he told me I was mistaken if I thought his friend was a numskull, for he had had "the biggest brain-pan in College Green," and the way he could learn things when he wanted to was wonderful.

He might be a bit shaky in his spelling, and perhaps he couldn't lick the world in Latin, but his heart was always in exploring, and the way he knew geography, especially the part of it they call the "Unknown," the Arctic, and the Antarctic, and what Charcot had done there, and Biscoe and Bellamy and D'Urville and Greely and Nansen and Shackleton and Peary, was enough to make the provost and professors look like fools of the earth by the side of him.

"Why, what do you think?" said the doctor. "When he went to London to apply for his billet, the Lieutenant said to him: 'You must have been down there before, young man.' 'No such luck,' said Martin. 'But you know as much about the Antarctic already as the whole boiling of us put together,' said the Lieutenant. Yes, by St. Patrick and St. Thomas, he's a geographer any way."

I admitted that much, and to encourage the doctor to go on I told him where I had seen Martin last, and what he had said of his expedition.

"In Rome you say?" said the doctor, with a note of jealousy. "You beat me there then. I saw him off from London, though. A few of us Dublin boys, being in town at the time, went down to Tilbury to see him sail, and when they were lifting anchor and the tug was hitching on, we stood on the pier—sixteen strong—and set up some of our college songs. 'Stop your noising, boys,' said he, 'the Lieutenant will be hearing you.' But not a bit of it. We sang away as long as we could see him going out with the tide, and then we went back in the train, smoking our pipes like so many Vauxhall chimneys, and narra a word out of the one of us. . . . Yes, yes, there are some men like that. They come like the stars of night and go like the light of heaven. Same as there are some women who walk the world like the sun, and leave the grass growing green wherever their feet have trod.''

It was very ridiculous, I did not then understand why it should be so, but the tears came gushing into my eyes while the doctor spoke, and it was as much as I could do to preserve my composure.

What interpretation my husband put upon my emotion I do not know, but I saw that his face darkened, and when the doctor turned to him to ask if he also knew Martin he answered curtly and brusquely,

''Not I. No loss either, I should say.''

''No loss?'' said the doctor. ''Show me the man under the stars of God that's fit to hold a candle to Martin Conrad, and by the angel Gabriel I'll go fifty miles out of my way to put a sight on him.''

More than ever after this talk about Martin Conrad I was feeling defenceless, and at the mercy of my husband's wishes and whims, when something happened which seemed to change his character altogether.

The third day out, on a bright and quiet morning, we called at Malta, and while my husband went ashore to visit some friends in the garrison, I sat on deck watching the life of the little port and looking at the big warships anchored in the bay.

A Maltese woman came on board to sell souvenirs of the island, and picking out of her tray a tiny twisted thing in coral, I asked what it was.

''That's a charm, my lady,'' said the woman.

''A charm for what?''

''To make my lady's husband love her.''

I felt my face becoming crimson, but my heart was sore, so in my simplicity I bought the charm and was smuggling it into my bag when I became aware that one of my fellow-passengers, a lady, was looking down at me.

She was a tall, singularly handsome woman, fashionably and (although on shipboard) almost sumptuously dressed. A look in her face was haunting me with a memory I could not fix when she stooped and said:

''Aren't you Mary O'Neill?''

The voice completed the identification, and I knew who it was. It was Alma Lier.

She was now about seven-and-twenty and in the prime of her young womanhood. Her beautiful auburn hair lay low over her broad forehead, almost descending to her long sable-coloured eyebrows. Her cheeks were very white, (rather beyond the whiteness of nature, I thought), and her lips were more than commonly red, with the upper one a little thin and the lower slightly set forward. But her eyes were still her distinguishing feature, being larger and blacker than before and having that vivid gaze that looked through and through you and made you feel that few women and no man in the world would have the power to resist her.

Her movements were almost noiseless, and as she sank into the chair by my side there was a certain over-sweetness in the soft succulent tones of the voice with which she began to tell me what had happened to her since I had seen her last.

It was a rather painful story. After two or three years in a girls' college in her own country she had set out with her mother for a long tour of the European capitals. In Berlin, at what was falsely called a Charity Ball, she had met a young Russian Count who was understood to be rich and related to one of the Grand Ducal families. Against the protests of her father (a shrewd American banker), she had married the Count, and they had returned to New York, where her mother had social ambitions.

There they had suffered a serious shock. It turned out that her husband had deceived them, and that he was really a poor and quite nameless person, only remotely related to the family he claimed to belong to.

Nevertheless Alma had ''won out'' at last. By digging deep into her father's treasury she got rid of her treacherous husband, and going ''way out west,'' she had been able, in due time, to divorce him.

Since then she had resumed her family name, being known as Madame Lier, and now she was on her way to Egypt to spend the season at Cairo.

''And you?'' she said. ''You stayed long at the convent —yes?''

I answered that I had, and then in my fluttering voice (for some of the old spell of her presence had come sweeping back upon me) I replied one by one to the questions she asked about the Reverend Mother, the ''Reverend Mother Mildred,'' Sister Angela and Father Giovanni, not to speak of myself, whom she had always thought of as ''Margaret Mary'' because I had looked so innocent and nun-like.

''And now you are married!'' she said. ''Married so splendidly, too! We heard all about it. Mother was so interested. What a lucky girl you are! Everybody says your husband is so handsome and charming. He is, isn't he?"

I was doing my utmost to put the best face upon my condition without betraying the facts or simulating sentiments which I could not feel, when a boat from the shore pulled up at the ship's side, and my husband stepped on to the deck.

In his usual morose manner he was about to pass without speaking on his way to his state-room, when his eyes fell on Alma sitting beside me. Then he stopped and looked at us, and, stepping up, he said, in a tone I had never heard from him before:

"Mary, my dear, will you not present me to your friend?"

I hesitated, and then with a quivering of the lips I did so. But something told me as I introduced my husband to Alma, and Alma to my husband, and they stood looking into each other's eyes and holding each other's hands (for Alma had risen and I was sitting between them), that this was the most momentous incident of my life thus far—that for good or ill my hour had struck and I could almost hear the bell.

FORTY-FIFTH CHAPTER

From that hour forward my husband was a changed man. His manner to me, so brusque before, became courteous, kind, almost affectionate. Every morning he would knock at the door of my state-room to ask if I had slept well, or if the movement of the steamer had disturbed me.

His manner to Alma was charming. He was up before breakfast every day, promenading the deck with her in the fresh salt air. I would slide back my window and hear their laughter as they passed, above the throb of the engines and the wash of the sea. Sometimes they would look in upon me and joke, and Alma would say:

"And how's Margaret Mary this morning?"

Our seats in the saloon had been changed. Now we sat with Alma at the Captain's table, and though I sorely missed the doctor's racy talk about Martin Conrad I was charmed by Alma's bright wit and the fund of her personal anecdotes. She seemed to know nearly everybody. My husband knew everybody also, and their conversation never flagged.

Something of the wonderful and worshipful feeling I had

had for Alma at the Sacred Heart came back to me, and as for my husband it seemed to me that I was seeing him for the first time.

He persuaded the Captain to give a dance on our last night at sea, so the awnings were spread, the electric lights were turned on, and the deck of the ship became a scene of enchantment.

My husband and Alma led off. He danced beautifully and she was dressed to perfection. Not being a dancer myself I stood with the Captain in the darkness outside, looking in on them in the bright and dazzling circle, while the moon-rays were sweeping the waters like a silver fan and the little waves were beating the ship's side with friendly pats.

I was almost happy. In my simplicity I was feeling grateful to Alma for having wrought this extraordinary change, so that when, on our arrival at Port Said, my husband said,

"Your friend Madame Lier has made no arrangements for her rooms at Cairo—hadn't I better telegraph to our hotel, dear?" I answered, "Yes," and wondered why he had asked me.

Our hotel was an oriental building, situated on an island at the further side of the Nile. Formerly the palace of a dead Khedive, who had built it in honour of the visit of an Empress, it had a vast reception hall with a great staircase.

There, with separated rooms, as in London, we remained for three months. I was enthralled. Too young and inexperienced to be conscious of the darker side of the picture before me, I found everything beautiful. I was seeing fashionable life for the first time, and it was entrancing.

Lovely and richly-dressed ladies in silk, velvet, lace, and no limit of jewellery—the dark French women, the blonde German women, the stately English women, and the American women with their flexuous grace. And then the British soldiers in their various uniforms, the semi-Turks in their red tarbooshes, and the diplomats of all nationalities, Italian, Austrian, French, German—what a cosmopolitan world it was, what a meeting-place of all nations!

Every hour had its interest, but I liked best the hour of tea on the terrace, for that was the glorious hour of woman, when every condition invested her dress with added beauty and her smile with greater charm.

Such a blaze of colour in the sunshine! Such a sea of muslin, flowers, and feathers! Such lovely female figures in diaphanous clouds of toilettes, delicate as gossamer and varied as the colours in the rainbow! They were like a living bouquet, as they sat under the shade of the verandah, with the green lawns and the palm trees in front, the red-coated orchestra behind, and the noiseless forms of swarthy Bedouins and Nubians moving to and fro.

Although I had been brought up in such a different world altogether I could not help being carried away by all this beauty. My senses burgeoned out and my heart seemed to expand.

As for Alma and my husband, they seemed to belong to the scene of themselves. She would sit at one of the tea-tables, swishing away the buzzing flies with a little whip of cord and cowries, and making comments on the crowd in soft undertones which he alone seemed to catch. Her vivid and searching eyes, with their constant suggestion of laughter, seemed to be picking out absurdities on every side and finding nearly everybody funny.

She found me funny also. My innocence and my convent-bred ideas were a constant subject of jest with her.

"What does our dear little Margaret Mary think of that?" she would say with a significant smile, at sights that seemed to me quite harmless.

After a while I began to have a feeling of indefinable uneasiness about Alma. She was daily redoubling her cordiality, always calling me her "dearest sweetest girl," and "the oldest friend she had in the world." But little by little I became conscious of a certain commerce between her and my husband in which I had no part. Sometimes I saw her eyes seeking his, and occasionally I heard them exchange a few words about me in French, which (because I did not speak it, being uncertain of my accent) they thought I did not understand.

Perhaps this helped to sharpen my wits, for I began to see that I had gone the wrong way to work with my husband. Instead of trying to make myself fall in love with my husband, I should have tried to make my husband fall in love with me.

When I asked myself how this was to be done I found one obvious answer—I must become the sort of woman my husband admired and liked; in short I must imitate Alma.

I resolved to do this, and after all that has happened since I feel a little ashamed to tell of the efforts I made to play a part for which I was so ill-fitted by nature and education.

Some of them were silly enough perhaps, but some were almost pathetic, and I am not afraid that any good woman will laugh at the futile shifts I was put to, in my girlish ignorance, to make my husband love me.

"I must do it," I thought. "I must, I must!"

FORTY-SIXTH CHAPTER

Hitherto I had attended to myself, but now I determined to have a maid. I found one without much difficulty. Her name was Price. She was a very plain woman of thirty, with piercing black eyes; and when I engaged her she seemed anxious above all else to make me understand that she "never saw anything."

I soon discovered that she saw everything, especially the relations between myself and my husband, and that she put her own interpretation (not a very flattering one) on our separated apartments. She also saw the position of Alma, and putting her own interpretation upon that also, she tortured me with many pin-pricks.

Under the guidance of my maid I began to haunt the shops of the dressmakers, the milliners and the jewellers. It did not require the memory of my father's letter to make me spend his money—I spent it like water. Feeling ashamed of my quaker-cut costumes (Alma had a costume for every day of the week, and wore a large gold snake on her arm), I bought the most costly toilettes, and loaded myself with bracelets, rings and necklaces.

I was dressing for my husband, and for him I did many things I had never dreamt of doing before. For him I filed my nails, put cream on my skin, perfume on my handkerchief, and even rouge on my lips. Although I did not allow myself to think of it so, I was running a race with Alma.

My maid knew that before I did, and the first night she put me into one of my uncomfortable new gowns she stood off from me and said:

"His lordship must me a strange gentleman if he can resist you *now.*"

I felt ashamed, yet pleased too, and went downstairs with a certain confidence.

The result was disappointing. My husband smiled rather condescendingly, and though Alma praised me beyond measure I saw that she was secretly laughing as she said:

"Our Margaret Mary is coming out, isn't she?"

Nevertheless I persevered. Without too much preparation for so perilous an enterprise, I threw myself into the gaieties of Cairo, attending polo matches, race-meetings, picnics at the Pyramids, dances at the different hotels, and on the island of Roda, where according to tradition, Pharaoh's daughter found Moses in the bulrushes.

I think I may say that I drew the eyes of other men upon me, particularly those of the colonel commanding on the Citadel, a fine type of Scotsman, who paid me the most worshipful attention. But I thought of nobody but my husband, being determined to make him forget Alma and fall in love with me.

It was a hopeless task, and I had some heart-breaking hours. One day, calling at a jeweller's to see a diamond necklace which I greatly coveted, I was told in confidence that my husband had been pricing it, but had had to give it up because it was a thousand francs too dear for him. I was foolish enough to pay the thousand francs myself, under a pledge of secrecy, and to tell the jeweller to send the necklace to my husband, feeling sure in my simplicity that it had been meant for me.

Next night I saw it on Alma's neck, and could have died of mortification and shame.

I daresay it was all very weak and very childish, but I really think my last attempt, if rather ridiculous, was also very pitiful.

Towards the end of our stay the proprietors of the hotel gave a Cotillon. As this was the event of the season, and nearly every woman was giving a dinner in honour of it, I resolved that I too would give one, inviting the gayest of the gay acquaintances I had made in Cairo.

Feeling that it would be my last battle, and that so much depended upon it, I dressed myself with feverish care, in a soft white satin gown, which was cut lower than I had ever worn before, with slippers to match, a tight band of pearls about my throat and another about my head.

When Price had finished dressing me she said:

"Well, if his lordship prefers anybody else in the world to-night I shan't know where he puts his eyes."

The compliment was a crude one, but I had no time to think of that, for my heart was fluttering with hopes and fears, and I think any woman would forgive me under the circumstances if I told myself, as I passed the tall mirrors on the stairs, that I too was beautiful.

The dining-room was crowded when I entered it with my guests, and seeing that we were much observed it flashed upon me that my husband and I had become a subject of gossip. Partly for that reason I strangled the ugly thing that was writhing in my bosom, and put Alma (who had flown to me with affectionate rapture) next to my husband, and the colonel commanding on the Citadel in the seat beside me.

Throughout the dinner, which was very long, I was very nervous, and though I did my best to keep up conversation with the colonel, I knew quite well that I was listening to what was being said at the other side of my big round table, and as often as any mention was made of "Margaret Mary" I heard it.

More than once Alma lifted her glass with a gracious nod and smile, crying, "Mary dearest!" and then in another moment gave my husband one of her knowing glances which seemed to me to say, "Look at that foolish little wife of yours!"

By the time we returned to the hall for coffee we were rather a noisy party, and even the eyes of the ladies betrayed the fact that they had dined. The talk, which had grown louder, was also a little more free, and God forgive me, I joined in it, being feverishly anxious to outdo Alma, and be looked upon as a woman of the world.

Towards eleven o'clock, the red-coated orchestra began to play a waltz, and then the whole variegated company of ladies, soldiers, and diplomats stood up to dance, and the colonel asked me to join him.

I was ashamed to tell him that I had never danced except with a schoolgirl, so I took his hand and started. But hardly had we begun, when I made mistakes, which I thought everybody saw (I am sure Alma saw them), and before we had taken many turns my partner had to stop, whereupon I retired to my seat with a forced laugh and a sense of confusion.

It was nearly twelve when they began the Cotillon, which Alma and my husband led with supreme self-possession. As one of the hostesses I sat in the front row of the square, and when I was taken out I made further mistakes, which also Alma saw and communicated by smiles to my husband.

Before the Cotillon came to an end the night was far spent and then the company, which had become very boisterous, began to look for some new excitement, no matter how foolish. One or other started "turkey trot" and "grizzly bear" and finally Alma, with memories of the winter sports at St. Moritz, proposed that they should toboggan down the great staircase.

The suggestion was welcomed with a shout, and a broad board was immediately laid on the first long flight of stairs for people to slide on.

Soldiers went first, and then there were calls for the ladies, when Alma took her turn, tucking her dress under her at the top and alighting safely on her feet at the bottom. Other ladies followed her example, with similar good fortune, and then Alma, who had been saying "Such fun! Such lots of fun!" set up a cry of "Margaret Mary."

I refused at first, feeling ashamed of even looking at such unwomanly folly, but something Alma said to my husband and something that was conveyed by my husband's glance at me set my heart afire and, poor feverish and entangled fool that I was, I determined to defy them.

So running up to the top and seating myself on the toboggan I set it in motion. But hardly had I done so when it swayed, reeled, twisted and threw me off, with the result that I rolled downstairs to the bottom.

Of course there were shrieks of laughter, and if I had been in the spirit of the time and place I suppose I should have laughed too, and there would have been an end of the matter. But I had been playing a part, a tragic part, and feeling that I had failed and covered myself with ridicule, I was overwhelmed with confusion.

I thought my husband would be angry with me, and feel compromised by my foolishness, but he was not; he was amused, and when at last I saw his face it was running in rivulets from the laughter he could not restrain.

That was the end of all things, and when Alma came up to me, saying everything that was affectionate and insincere, about her "poor dear unfortunate Margaret Mary" (only women know how to wound each other so), I brushed her aside, went off to my bedroom, and lay face down on the sofa, feeling that I was utterly beaten and could fight no more.

Half an hour afterwards my husband came in, and though I did not look up I heard him say, in a tone of indulgent sympathy that cut me to the quick:

"You've been playing the wrong part, my child. A Madonna, yes, but a Venus, no! It's not your *métier.*"

"What's the good? What's the good? What's the good?" I asked myself.

I thought my heart was broken.

FORTY-SEVENTH CHAPTER

With inexpressible relief I heard the following day that we were to leave for Rome immediately.

Alma was to go with us, but that did not matter to me in the least. Outside the atmosphere of this place, so artificial, so unrelated to nature, her power over my husband would be gone. Once in the Holy City everything would be different. Alma would be different, I should be different, above all my husband would be different. I should take him to the churches and basilicas; I should show him the shrines and papal processions, and he would see me in my true "part" at last!

But what a deep disappointment awaited me!

On reaching Rome we put up at a fashionable hotel in the new quarter of the Ludovisi, and although that was only a few hundred yards from the spot on which I had spent nine happy years it seemed to belong to another world altogether. Instead of the church domes and the monastery bells, there were the harsh clang of electric trams, the thrum and throb of automobiles, the rattle of cars and the tramp of soldiers.

Then I realised that there were two Romes—an old Rome and a new one, and that the Rome we had come to hardly differed from the Cairo we had left behind.

There was the same varied company of people of all nations, English, Americans, French, German; the same nomad tribes of the rich and dissolute, pitching their tents season by season in the sunny resorts of Europe; the same aimless society, the same debauch of fashion, the same callous and wicked luxury, the same thirst for selfish pleasures, the same busy idleness, the same corruption of character and sex.

This made me very unhappy, but from first to last Alma was in the highest spirits. Everybody seemed to be in Rome that spring, and everybody seemed to be known either to her or to my husband. For Alma's sake we were invited everywhere, and thus we saw not only the life of the foreign people of the hotels but that of a part (not the better part) of the Roman aristocracy.

Alma was a great success. She had the homage of all the men, and being understood to be rich, and having the gift of making every man believe he was her special favourite, she was rarely without a group of Italian noblemen about her chair.

With sharper eyes the Italian women saw that her real reckoning lay with my husband, but they seemed to think no worse of her for that. They seemed to think no worse of him either. It was nothing against him that, having married me (as everybody appeared to know) for the settlement of his financial difficulties, he had transferred his attentions, even on his honeymoon, to this brilliant and alluring creature.

As for me, I was made to realise that I was a person of a different class altogether. When people wished to be kind they called me *spirituelle*, and when they were tempted to be the reverse they voted me insipid.

As a result I became very miserable in this company, and I can well believe that I may have seemed awkward and shy and stupid when I was in some of their grey old palaces full of tapestry and bronze, for I sometimes found the talk there so free (especially among the women) that the poisoned jokes went quivering through me.

Things I had been taught to think sacred were so often derided that I had to ask myself if it could be Rome, my holy and beloved Rome—this city of license and unbelief.

But Alma was entirely happy, especially when the talk turned on conjugal fidelity, and the faithful husband was held up to ridicule. This happened very often in one house we used to go to—that of a Countess of ancient family who was said to have her husband and her lover at either side of her when she sat down to dinner.

She was a large and handsome person of middle age, with a great mass of fair hair, and she gave me the feeling that in her case the body of a woman was inhabited by the soul of a man.

She christened me her little Irish *bambino*, meaning her child; and one night in her drawing-room, after dinner, before the men had joined us, she called me to her side on the couch, lit a cigarette, crossed her legs, and gave us with startling candour her views of the marriage bond.

"What can you except, you women?" she said. "You run after the men for their titles—they've very little else, except debts, poor things—and what is the result? The first result is that though you have bought them you belong to them. Yes, your husband owns his beautiful woman, just as he owns his beautiful horse or his beautiful dog."

This was so pointed that I felt my face growing crimson, but Alma and the other women only laughed, so the Countess went on:

"What then? Once in a blue moon each goes his and her own way without sin. You agree to a sort of partnership for mutual advantage in which you live together in chastity under the same roof. What a life! What an ice-house!"

Again the other women laughed, but I felt myself blushing deeply.

"But in the majority of cases it is quite otherwise. The business purpose served, each is open to other emotions. The man becomes unfaithful, and the woman, if she has any spirit, pays him out tit for tat—and why shouldn't she?"

After that I could bear no more, and before I knew what I was saying I blurted out:

"But I find that wrong and wicked. Infidelity on the part of the man does not justify infidelity in the woman. The prayer-book says so."

Alma burst out laughing, and the Countess smiled and continued:

"Once in a hundred years there comes a great passion—Dante and Beatrice, Petrarch and Laura. The woman meets the right man too late. What a tragedy! What a daily and hourly crucifixion! Unless," said the Countess with emphasis, "she is prepared to renounce the law and reject society and live a life of complete emancipation. But in a Catholic country, where there is no divorce, what woman can afford to do that? Nobody in the higher classes can—especially if she has to sacrifice her title. So the wise woman avoids scandal, keeps her little affair with her lover to herself, and . . . and that's marriage, my dears."

A twitter of approval, led by Alma, came from the other women, but I was quivering with anger and I said:

"Then marriage is an hypocrisy and an imposture. If I found I loved somebody better than my husband, I should go to him in spite of the law, and society, and title and . . . and everything."

"Of course you would, my dear," said the Countess, smiling at me as at a child, "but that's because you are such a sweet, simple, innocent little Irish *bambino.*"

It must have been a day or two after this that we were invited to the Roman Hunt. I had no wish to go, but Alma who had begun to use me in order to "save her face" in relation to my husband, induced me to drive them out in a motor-car to the place on the Campagna where they were to mount their horses.

"Dear sweet girl!" said Alma. "How could we possibly go without you?"

It was Sunday, and I sat between Alma in her riding habit and my husband in his riding breeches, while we ran through the Porta San Giovanni, and past the *osterie* where the pleasure-loving Italian people were playing under the pergolas with their children, until we came to the meeting-ground of the Hunt, by the Trappist monastery of Tre Fontane.

A large company of the Roman aristocracy were gathered there with their horses and hounds, and they received Alma and my husband with great cordiality. What they thought of me I do not know, except that I was a childish and complacent wife; and when at the sound of the horn the hunt began, and my husband and Alma went prancing off with the rest, without once looking back, I asked myself in my shame and distress if I could bear my humiliation much longer.

But then came a moment of unexpected pleasure. A cheerful voice on the other side of the car said:

"Good morning, Lady Raa."

It was the young Irish doctor from the steamer. His ship had put into Naples for two days, and, like Martin Conrad before my marriage, he had run up to look at Rome.

"But have you heard the news?" he cried.

"What news?"

"About the South Pole Expedition—they're on their way home."

"So soon?"

"Yes, they reached New Zealand on Saturday was a week."

"And . . . and . . . and Martin Conrad?"

"He's well, and what's better, he has distinguished himself."

"I . . . I . . . I knew he would."

"So did I! The way I was never fearing that if they gave Mart half a chance he would come out top! Do or die—that was his watch-word."

"I know! I know!"

His eyes were sparkling and so I suppose were mine, while with a joyous rush of racy words, (punctuated by me with "Yes," "Yes," "Yes") he told of a long despatch from the Lieutenant published by one of the London papers, in which Martin had been specially mentioned—how he had been put in command of some difficult and perilous expedition, and had worked wonders.

"How splendid! How glorious! How perfectly magnificent!" I said.

"Isn't it?" said the doctor, and for a few moments more we bandied quick questions and replies like children playing at battledore and shuttlecock. Then he said:

"But I'm after thinking it's mortal strange I never heard him mention you. There was only one chum at home he used to talk about and that was a man—a boy, I mean. Mally he was calling him—that's short for Maloney, I suppose."

"For Mary," I said.

"Mary, is it? Why, by the saints, so it is! Where in the name of St. Patrick has been the Irish head at me that I never thought of that before? And you were . . . Yes? Well, by the powers, ye've a right to be proud of him, for he was thinking pearls and diamonds of you. I was mortal jealous of Mally, I remember. 'Mally's a stunner,' he used to say. 'Follow you anywhere, if you wanted it, in spite of the devil and hell.' "

The sparkling eyes were growing misty by this time but the woman in me made me say—I couldn't help it—

"I dare say he's had many girl friends since my time, though?"

"Narra a one. The girls used to be putting a glime on him in Dublin—they're the queens of the world too, those Dublin girls—but never a skute of the eye was he giving to the one of them. I used to think it was work, but maybe it wasn't . . . maybe it was. . . ."

I dare not let him finish what I saw he was going to say—I didn't know what would happen to me if he did—so I jumped in by telling him that, if he would step into the car, I would drive him back to Rome.

He did so, and all the way he talked of Martin, his courage and resource and the hardships he had gone through, until (with backward thoughts of Alma and my husband riding away over the Campagna) my heart, which had been leaping like a lamb, began to ache and ache.

We returned by the Old Appian Way, where the birds were building their nests among the crumbling tombs, through the Porta San Paolo, and past the grave of the "young English poet" of whom I have always thought it was not so sad that he died of consumption as in the bitterness of a broken heart.

All this time I was so much at home with the young Irish doctor, who was Martin's friend, that it was not until I was putting him down at his hotel that I remembered I did not even know his name.

It was O'Sullivan.

FORTY-EIGHTH CHAPTER

EVERY day during our visit to Rome I had reminded myself of the Reverend Mother's invitation to call on her, and a sense of moral taint had prevented me, but now I determined to see her at least by going to Benediction at her Convent church the very next day.

It happened, however, that this was the time when the Artists' Club of Rome were giving a Veglione (a kind of fancy-dress ball), and as Alma and my husband desired to go to it, and were still in the way of using me to keep themselves in countenance, I consented to accompany them on condition that I did not dress or dance, and that they would go with me to Benediction the following day.

"Dear sweet girl!" said Alma. "We'll do whatever you like. Of course we will."

I wore my soft satin without any ornaments, and my husband merely put scarlet facings on the lapels of his evening coat, but Alma was clad in a gorgeous dress of old gold, with Oriental skirts which showed her limbs in front but had a long train behind, and made her look like a great vampire bat.

It was eleven o'clock before we reached the theatre, but already the auditorium was full, and so well had the artists done their work of decoration, making the air alive with floating specks of many-coloured lights, like the fire-flies at Nemi, that the scene was one of enchantment.

It was difficult to believe that on the other side of the walls was the street, with the clanging electric bells and people hurrying by with their collars up, for the night was cold, and it had begun to rain as we came in, and one poor woman, with a child under her shawl, was standing by the entrance trying to sell evening papers.

I sat alone in a box on the ground tier while Alma and my husband and their friends were below on the level of the *poltroni* (the stalls) that had been arranged for the dancing, which began immediately after we arrived and went on without a break until long after midnight.

Then there was supper on the stage, and those who did not eat drank a good deal until nearly everybody seemed to be under the influence of alcohol. As a consequence many of the people, especially some of the women (not good women I fear), seemed to lose all control of themselves, singing snatches of noisy songs, sipping out of the men's glasses, taking the smoke of cigarettes out of the men's mouths, sitting on the men's knees, and even riding astride on the men's arms and shoulders.

I bore these sights as long as I could, making many fruitless appeals to my husband to take me home; and I was just about to leave of myself, being sick of the degradation of my sex, when a kind of rostrum, with an empty chair on top of it, was carried in on the shoulders of a number of men.

This was for the enthronement of the Queen of Beauty, and as it passed round the arena, with the mock judges in paper coronets, walking ahead to make their choice, some of the women, lost to all sense of modesty, were shouting "Take *me!* Take *me!*"

I felt sure they would take Alma, so I reached forward to get a better view of her, where she stood below my box; but as they approached her, with the chair still empty, I saw her make a movement in my direction and say something to the judges about "the little nun," which made my husband nod his head and then laugh uproariously.

At the next moment, before I knew what they were doing, six or seven men jumped into my box, lifted me on to the rostrum and placed me in the chair, whereupon the whole noisy company in the theatre broke into wild shouts of salutation and pelted me with flowers and confetti.

If there was any pride there was more mortification in the position to which Alma and my husband had exposed me, for as I was being carried round the arena, with the sea of foaming faces below me, all screaming out of their hot and open mouths, I heard the men cry:

"Smile, Signorina!"

"Not so serious, Mademoiselle!"

It would do no good to say what memories of other scenes flashed back on my mind as I was being borne along in the mad procession. I felt as if it would last for ever. But it came to an end at length, and as soon as I was released, I begged my husband again to take me home, and when he said, "Not yet; we'll all be going by-and-by," I stole away by myself, found a cab, and drove back to the hotel.

The day was dawning as I passed through the stony streets, and when I reached my room, and pulled down my dark green blinds, the bell of the Capuchin monastery in the Via Veneto was ringing and the monks were saying the first of their offices.

I must have been some time in bed, hiding my hot face in the bed-clothes, when Price, my maid, came in to apologise for not having seen me come back alone. The pain of the woman's scrutiny was more than I could bear at that moment, so I tried to dismiss her, but I could not get her to go, and at last she said:

"If you please, my lady, I want to say something."

I gave her no encouragement, yet she continued.

"I daresay it's as much as my place is worth, but I'm bound to say it."

Still I said nothing, yet she went on:

"His Lordship and Madame have also arrived. . . . They came back half an hour ago. And just now . . . I saw his lordship . . . coming out of Madame's room."

"Go away, woman, go away," I cried in the fierce agony of my shame, and she went out at last, closing the door noisily behind her.

We did not go next day to Benediction at the Reverend Mother's church. But late the same night, when it was quite dark, I crept out of my room into the noisy streets, hardly knowing where my footsteps were leading me, until I found myself in the piazza of the Convent of the Sacred Heart.

It was quiet enough there. Only the Carabinieri were walking on the paved way with measured steps, and the bell of the Dominican monastery was slowly ringing under the silent stars. I could see the light on the Pope's loggia at the Vatican and hear the clock of St. Peter's striking nine.

There were lights in the windows of some of the dormitories also, and by that I knew that the younger children, the children of the Infant Jesus, were going to bed. There was a light too, in the large window of the church, and that told me that the bigger girls were saying their night prayers.

Creeping close to the convent wall I heard the girls' voices rising and falling, and then through the closed door of the church came the muffled sound of their evening hymn—

"Ave maris stella
Dei Mater Alma——"

I did not know why I was putting myself wilfully to this bitter pain—the pain of remembering the happy years in which I myself was a girl singing so, and then telling myself that other girls were there now who knew nothing of me.

I thought of the Reverend Mother, and then of my own mother, my saint, my angel, who had told me to think of her when I sang that hymn; and then I remembered where I was and what had happened to me.

"Virgin of all virgins,
To thy shelter take me."

I felt like an outcast. A stifling sensation came into my throat and I dropped to my knees in the darkness. I thought I was broken-hearted.

FORTY-NINTH CHAPTER

Not long after that we left Italy on our return to England. We were to reach home by easy stages so as to see some of the great capitals of Europe, but I had no interest in the journey

Our first stay was at Monte Carlo, that sweet garden of the Mediterranean which God seems to smile upon and man to curse.

If I had been allowed to contemplate the beautiful spectacle of nature I think I could have been content, but Alma, with her honeyed and insincere words, took me to the Casino on the usual plea of keeping her in countenance.

I hated the place from the first, with its stale air, its chink of louis d'or, its cry of the croupiers, its strained faces about the tables, and its general atmosphere of wasted hopes and fears and needless misery and despair.

As often as I could I crept out to look at the flower fêtes in the streets, or to climb the hill of La Turbie and think I was on my native rocks with Martin Conrad, or even to sit in my room and watch the poor wounded pigeons from the pigeontraps as they tumbled and ducked into the sea after the shots fired, by cruel and unsportsmanlike sportsmen, from the rifle-range below.

In Monte Carlo my husband's vices seemed to me to grow rank and fast. The gambling fever took complete possession of him. At first he won and then he drank heavily, but afterwards he lost and then his nature became still more ugly and repulsive.

One evening towards eight o'clock, I was in my room, trying to comfort a broken-winged pigeon which had come floundering through the open window, when my husband entered with wild eyes.

"The red's coming up at all the tables," he cried breathlessly. "Give me some money, quick!"

I told him I had no money except the few gold pieces in my purse.

"You've a cheque book—give me a cheque, then."

I told him that even if I gave him a cheque he could not cash it that night, the banks being closed.

"The jewellers are open though, and you have jewels, haven't you? Stop fooling with that creature, and let me have some of them to pawn."

The situation was too abject for discussion, so I pointed to the drawer in which my jewels were kept, and he tore it open, took what he wanted and went out hurriedly without more words.

After that I saw no more of him for two days, when with black rings about his eyes he came in to say he must leave "this accursed place" immediately or we should all be ruined.

Our last stopping-place was Paris, and in my ignorance of the great French capital which has done so much for the world, I thought it must be the sink of every kind of corruption.

We put up at a well-known hotel in the Champs Elysées, and there (as well as in the cafés in the Bois and at the races at Longchamps on Sundays) we met the same people again, most of them English and Americans on their way home after the winter. It seemed to me strange that there should be so many men and women in the world with nothing to do, merely loafing round it like tramps—the richest being the idlest, and the idlest the most immoral.

My husband knew many Frenchmen of the upper classes, and I think he spent several hours every day at their clubs, but (perhaps at Alma's instigation) he made us wallow through the filth of Paris by night.

"It will be lots of fun," said Alma. "And then who is to know us in places like those?"

I tolerated this for a little while, and then refused to be dragged around any longer as a cloak for Alma's pleasures. Telling myself that if I continued to share my husband's habits of life, for any reason or under any pretext, I should become like him, and my soul would rot inch by inch, I resolved to be clean in my own eyes and to resist the contaminations of his company.

As a consequence, he became more and more reckless, and Alma made no efforts to restrain him, so that it came to pass at last that they went together to a scandalous entertainment which was for a while the talk of the society papers throughout Europe.

I know no more of this entertainment than I afterwards learned from those sources—that it was given by a notorious woman, who was not shut out of society because she was "the good friend" of a King; that she did the honours with clever imitative elegance; that her salon that night was crowded with such male guests as one might see at the court of a queen—princes, dukes, marquises, counts, English noblemen and members of parliament, as well as some reputable women of my own and other countries; that the tables were laid for supper at four o'clock with every delicacy of the season and wines of the rarest vintage; that after supper dancing was resumed with increased animation; and that the dazzling and improper spectacle terminated with a *Chaîne diabolique* at seven in the morning, when the sun was streaming through the windows and the bells of the surrounding churches were ringing for early mass.

I had myself risen early that morning to go to communion at the Madeleine, and never shall I forget the effect of cleansing produced upon me by the sacred sacrament. From the moment when—the priest standing at the foot of the altar—the choir sang the *Kyrie eleison,* down to the solemn silence of the elevation, I had a sense of being washed from all the taint of the contaminating days since my marriage.

The music was Perosi's, I remember, and the voices in the *Gloria in excelsis,* which I used to sing myself, seemed to carry up the cry of my sorrowful heart to the very feet of the Virgin whose gracious figure hung above me.

"Cleanse me and intercede for me, O Mother of my God."

It was as though our Blessed Lady did so, for as I walked out of the church and down the broad steps in front of it, I had a feeling of purity and lightness that I had never known since my time at the Sacred Heart.

It was a beautiful day, with all the freshness and fragrance of early morning in summer, when the white stone houses of Paris seem to blush in the sunrise; and as I walked up the Champs Elysées on my way back to the hotel, I met under the chestnut trees, which were then in bloom, a little company of young girls returning to school after their first communion.

How sweet they looked! In their white muslin frocks, white shoes and stockings and gloves, white veils and coronets of white flowers, they were twittering away as merrily as the little birds that were singing unseen in the leaves above them.

It made me feel like a child myself to look at their sweet faces; but turning into the hotel I felt like a woman too, for I thought the great and holy mystery, the sacrament of union and love, had given me such strength that I could meet any further wrong I might have to endure in my walk through the world with charity and forgiveness.

But how little a woman knows of her heart until it is tried in the fires of passion!

As I entered the salon which (as usual) divided my husband's bedroom from mine, I came upon my maid, Price, listening intently at my husband's closed door. This seemed to me so improper that I was beginning to reprove her, when she put her finger to her lip and coming over to me with her black eyes ablaze she said:

"I know you will pack me off for what I'm going to say, yet I can't help that. You've stood too much already, my lady, but if you are a woman and have any pride in yourself as a wife, go and listen at that door and see if you can stand any more."

With that she went out of the salon, and I tried to go to my own room, but I could not stir. Something held me to the spot on which I stood, and I found myself listening to the voices which I could distinctly hear in my husband's bedroom.

There were two voices, one a man's, loud and reckless, the other a woman's soft and cautious.

There was no need to tell myself whose voices they were, and neither did I ask myself any questions. I did not put to my mind the pros and cons of the case for myself or the case for my husband. I only thought and felt and behaved as any other wife would think and feel and behave at such a moment. An ugly and depraved thing, which my pride or my self-respect had never hitherto permitted me to believe in, suddenly leapt into life.

I was outraged. I was a victim of the treachery, the duplicity, the disloyalty, and the smothered secrecy of husband and friend.

My heart and soul were aflame with a sense of wrong. All the sweetening and softening and purifying effects of the sacrament were gone in an instant, and, moving stealthily across the carpet towards my husband's door, I swiftly turned the handle.

The door was locked.

I heard a movement inside the room and in a moment I hurried from the salon into the corridor, intending to enter by another door. As I was about to do so I heard the lock turned back by a cautious hand within. Then I swung the door open and boldly entered the room.

Nobody was there except my husband.

But I was just in time to catch the sound of rustling skirts in the adjoining apartment and to see a door closed gently behind them.

I looked around. Although the sun was shining, the blinds were down and the air was full of a rank odour of stale tobacco such as might have been brought back in people's clothes from that shameless woman's salon.

My husband, who had clearly been drinking, was looking at me with a half-senseless grin. His thin hair was a little disordered. His prominent front teeth showed hideously. I saw that he was trying to carry things off with an air.

"This *is* an unexpected pleasure. I think it must be the first time . . . the very first time that . . ."

I felt deadly cold; I almost swooned; I could scarcely breathe, but I said:

"Is that all you've got to say to me?"

"All? What else, my dear? I don't understand . . ."

"You understand quite well," I answered, and then looking towards the door of the adjoining apartment, I said, "both of you understand."

My husband began to laugh—a drunken, idiotic laugh.

"Oh, you mean that . . . perhaps you imagine that . . ."

"Listen," I said. "This is the end of everything between you and me."

"The end? Why, I thought that was long ago. In fact I thought everything ended before it began."

"I mean . . ." I knew I was faltering . . . "I mean that I can no longer keep up the farce of being your wife."

"Farce!" Again he laughed. "I congratulate you, my dear. Farce is exactly the word for it. Our relations have been a farce ever since the day we were married, and if anything has gone wrong you have only yourself to blame for it. What's a man to do whose wife is no company for anybody but the saints and angels?"

His coarse ridicule cut me to the quick. I was humiliated by the thought that after all in his own gross way my husband had something to say for himself.

Knowing I was no match for him I wanted to crawl away without another word. But my silence or the helpless expression of my face must have been more powerful than my speech, for after a few seconds in which he went on saying in his drawling way that I had been no wife to him, and if anything had happened I had brought it on myself, he stopped, and neither of us spoke for a moment.

Then feeling that if I stayed any longer in that room I should faint, I turned to go, and he opened the door for me and bowed low, perhaps in mockery, as I passed out.

When I reached my own bedroom I was so weak that I almost dropped, and so cold that my maid had to give me brandy and put hot bottles to my feet.

And then the tears came and I cried like a child.

FIFTIETH CHAPTER

I WAS far from well next morning and Price wished to keep me in bed, but I got up immediately when I heard that my husband was talking of returning to London.

Our journey was quite uneventful. We three sat together in the railway carriage and in the private cabin on the steamer, with no other company than Bimbo, my husband's terrier, and Prue, Alma's Pekingese spaniel.

Although he made no apology for his conduct of the day before my husband was quiet and conciliatory, and being sober he looked almost afraid, as if telling himself that he might have to meet my father soon—the one man in the world of whom he seemed to stand in fear.

Alma looked equally frightened, but she carried off her nervousness with a great show of affection, saying she was sorry I was feeling ‘‘badly,’’ that France and the South did not agree with me, and that I should be ever so much better when I was ‘‘way up north.’’

We put up at a well-known hotel near Trafalgar Square, the same that in our girlhood had been the subject of Alma’s dreams of future bliss, and I could not help observing that while my husband was selecting our rooms she made a rather ostentatious point of asking for an apartment on another floor.

It was late when we arrived, so I went to bed immediately, being also anxious to be alone that I might think out my course of action.

I was then firmly resolved that one way or other my life with my husband should come to an end; that I would no longer be befouled by the mire he had been dragging me through; that I should live a clean life and drink a pure draught, and oh, how my very soul seemed to thirst for it!

This was the mood in which I went to sleep, but when I awoke in the morning, almost before the dawn, the strength of my resolution ebbed away. I listened to the rumble of the rubber-bound wheels of the carriages and motor-cars that passed under my window and, remembering that I had not a friend in London, I felt small and helpless. What could I do alone? Where could I turn for assistance?

Instinctively I knew it would be of no use to appeal to my father, for though it was possible that he might knock my husband down, it was not conceivable that he would encourage me to separate from him.

In my loneliness and helplessness I felt like a ship-wrecked sailor, who, having broken away from the foundering vessel that would have sucked him under, is yet tossing on a raft with the threatening ocean on every side, and looking vainly for a sail.

At last I thought of Mr. Curphy, my father’s advocate, and decided to send a telegram to him asking for the name of some solicitor in London to whom I could apply for advice.

To carry out this intention I went down to the hall about nine o’clock, when people were passing into the breakfast-room, and visitors were calling at the bureau, and liveried page-boys were shouting names in the corridors.

There was a little writing-room at one side of the hall and I sat there to write my telegram. It ran—

"Please send name and address reliable solicitor London whom I can consult on important business."

I was holding the telegraph-form in my hand and reading my message again and again to make sure that it would lead to no mischief, when I began to think of Martin Conrad.

It seemed to me that some one had mentioned his name, but I told myself that must have been a mistake,—that, being so helpless and so much in need of a friend at that moment, my heart and not my ears had heard it.

Nevertheless as I sat holding my telegraph-form I became conscious of somebody who was moving about me. It was a man, for I could smell the sweet peaty odour of his Harris tweeds.

At length with that thrill which only the human voice can bring to us when it is the voice of one from whom we have been long parted, I heard somebody say, from the other side of the desk:

"Mary, is it you?"

I looked up, the blood rushed to my face and a dazzling mist floated before my eyes, so that for a moment I could hardly see who was there. But I *knew* who it was—it was Martin himself.

He came down on me like a breeze from the mountain, took me by both hands, telegram and all, and said:

"My goodness, this is stunning!"

I answered, as well as I could for the confusion that overwhelmed me.

"I'm so glad, so glad!"

"How well you are looking! A little thin, perhaps, but such a colour!"

"I'm so glad, so glad!" I repeated, though I knew I was only blushing.

"When did you arrive?"

I told him, and he said:

"*We* came into port only yesterday. And to think that you and I should come to the same hotel and meet on the very first morning! It's like a fate, as our people in the island say. But it's stunning, perfectly stunning!"

A warm tide of joy was coursing through me and taking away my breath, but I managed to say:

"I've heard about your expedition. You had great hardships."

"That was nothing! Just a little pleasure-trip down to the eighty-sixth latitude."

"And great successes?"

"That was nothing either. The chief was jolly good, and the boys were bricks."

"I'm so glad, so glad!" I said again, for a kind of dumb joy had taken possession of me, and I went on saying the same thing over and over again, as people do when they are very happy.

For two full minutes I felt happier than I had ever been in my life before; and then an icy chill came over me, for I remembered that I had been married since I saw Martin Conrad last and I did not know how I was to break the news to him.

Just then my husband and Alma came down the lift, and seeing me with a stranger, as they crossed the hall to go into the breakfast-room, they came up and spoke.

I had to introduce them and it was hard to do, for it was necessary to reveal everything in a word. I looked at Martin Conrad when I presented him to my husband and he did not move a muscle. Then I looked at my husband and under a very small bow his face grew dark.

I could not help seeing the difference between the two men as they stood together—Martin with his sea-blue eyes and his look of splendid health, and my husband with his sallow cheeks and his appearance of wasted strength—and somehow from some unsearchable depths of my soul the contrast humbled me.

When I introduced Alma she took Martin's hand and held it while she gazed searchingly into his eyes from under her eyebrows, as she always did when she was being presented to a man; but I saw that in this instance her glance fell with no more effect on its object than a lighted vesta on a running stream.

After the usual banal phrases my husband inquired if Martin was staying in the house, and then asked if he would dine with us some day.

"Certainly! Delighted! With all the pleasure in the world," said Martin.

"Then," said my husband with rather frigid politeness, "you will see more of your friend Mary."

"Yes," said Alma, in a way that meant much, "you will see more of your friend Mary."

"Don't you worry about that, ma'am. You *bet* I will," said Martin, looking straight into Alma's eyes; and though she laughed as she passed into the breakfast-room with my husband, I could see that for the first time in her life a man's face had frightened her.

"Then you knew?" I said, when they were gone.

"Yes; a friend of mine who met you abroad came down to see us into port and he . . ."

"Dr. O'Sullivan?"

"That's the man! Isn't he a boy? And, my gracious, the way he speaks of you! But now . . . now you must go to breakfast yourself, and I must be off about my business."

"Don't go yet," I said.

"I'll stay all day if you want me to; but I promised to meet the Lieutenant on the ship in half an hour, and . . ."

"Then you must go."

"Not yet. Sit down again. Five minutes will do no harm. And by the way, now that I look at you again, I'm not so sure that you . . . Italy, Egypt, there's enough sun down there, but you're pale . . . a little pale, aren't you?"

I tried to make light of my pallor but Martin looked uneasy, and after a moment he asked:

"How long are you staying in London?"

I told him I did not know, whereupon he said:

"Well, I'm to be here a month, making charts and tables and reports for the Royal Geographical Society, but if you want me for anything . . . do you want me now?"

"No-o, no, not now," I answered.

"Well, if you *do* want me for anything—anything at all, mind, just pass the word and the charts and the tables and the reports and the Royal Geographical Society may go to the . . . Well, somewhere."

I laughed and rose and told him he ought to go, though at the bottom of my heart I was wishing him to stay, and thinking how little and lonely I was, while here was a big brave man who could protect me from every danger.

We walked together to the door, and there I took his hand and held it, feeling, like a child, that if I let him go he might be lost in the human ocean outside and I should see no more of him.

At last, struggling hard with a lump that was gathering in my throat, I said:

"Martin, I have been so happy to see you. I've never been so happy to see anybody in my life. You'll let me see you again, won't you?"

"Won't I? Bet your life I will," he said, and then, as if seeing that my lip was trembling and my eyes were beginning to fill, he broke into a cheerful little burst of our native tongue, so as to give me a "heise" as we say in Ellan and to make me laugh at the last moment.

"Look here—keep to-morrow for me, will ye? If them ones" (my husband and Alma) "is afther axing ye to do anything else just tell them there's an ould shipmate ashore, and he's wanting ye to go 'asploring.' See? So-long!"

It had been like a dream, a beautiful dream, and as soon as I came to myself in the hall, with the visitors calling at the bureau and the page-boys shouting in the corridors, I found that my telegraph-form, crumpled and crushed, was still in the palm of my left hand.

I tore it up and went in to breakfast.

FOURTH PART

I FALL IN LOVE

FIFTY-FIRST CHAPTER

During our first day in London my husband had many visitors, including Mr. Eastcliff and Mr. Vivian, who had much to tell and arrange about.

I dare say a great many events had happened during our six months' absence from England; but the only thing I heard of was that Mr. Eastcliff had married his dancing-girl, that she had retired from the stage, and that her public appearances were now confined to the box-seat of a four-in-hand coach, which he drove from London to Brighton.

This expensive toy he proposed to bring round to the hotel the following day, which chanced to be Derby Day, when a party was to be made up for the races.

In the preparations for the party, Alma, who, as usual, attracted universal admiration, was of course included, but I did not observe that any provision was made for me, though that circumstance did not distress me in the least, because I was waiting for Martin's message.

It came early next morning in the person of Martin himself, who, running into our sitting-room like a breath of wind from the sea, said his fellow officers were separating that day, each going to his own home, and their commander had invited me to lunch with them on their ship, which was lying off Tilbury.

It did not escape me that my husband looked relieved at this news, and that Alma's face brightened as she said in her most succulent tones:

"I should go if I were you, Mary. The breeze on the river will do you a world of good, dear."

I was nothing loath to take them at their word, so I let them go off in their four-in-hand coach, a big and bustling party, while with a fast-beating heart I made ready to spend the day with Martin, having, as I thought, so much and such serious things to say to him.

A steam launch from the ship was waiting for us at the

Westminster Pier, and from the moment I stepped into it I felt like another woman. It was a radiant day in May, when the climate of our much-maligned London is the brightest and best, and the biggest city in the world is also the most beautiful.

How I loved it that day! The sunlight, the moving river, the soft air of early summer, the passing panorama of buildings, old and new—what a joy it was to me! I sat on a side seat, dipping my hand over the gunwale into the cool water, while Martin, with a rush of racy words, was pointing out and naming everything.

St. Paul's was soon past, with the sun glistening off the golden cross on its dome; then London Bridge; then the Tower, with its Traitors' Gate; then the new Thames Bridge; and then we were in the region of the barges and wharfs and warehouses, with their colliers and coasting traders, and with the scum of coal and refuse floating on the surface of the stream.

After that came uglier things still, which we did not mind, and then the great docks with the hammering of rivets and the cranking noise of the lightermen's donkey engines, loading and unloading the big steamers and sailing ships; and then the broad reaches of the river where the great liners, looking so high as we steamed under them, lay at anchor to their rusty cable-chains, with their port-holes gleaming in the sun like rows of eyes, as Martin said, in the bodies of gigantic fish.

At last we came out in a fresh breadth of water, with marshes on either side and a far view of the sea, and there, heaving a little to the flowing tide, and with a sea-gull floating over her mizzen mast, lay Martin's ship.

She was a wooden schooner, once a Dundee whaler called the *Mary* but now re-christened the *Scotia,* and it would be silly to say how my eyes filled at sight of her, just because she had taken Martin down into the deep Antarctic and brought him safely back again.

"She's a beauty, isn't she?" said Martin.

"Isn't she?" I answered, and in spite of all my troubles I felt entirely happy.

We had steamed down against a strong tide, so we were half an hour late for luncheon, and the officers had gone down to the saloon, but it was worth being a little after time to see the way they all leapt up and received me like a queen—

making me feel, as I never felt before, the difference between the politeness of the fashionable idlers and the manners of the men who do things.

"Holloa!" they cried.

"Excuse us, won't you? We thought something had happened and perhaps you were not coming," said the commander, and then he put me to sit between himself and Martin.

The strange thing was that I was at home in that company in a moment, and if anybody imagines that I must have been embarrassed because I was the only member of my sex among so many men he does not know the heart of a woman.

They were such big, bronzed manly fellows with the note of health and the sense of space about them—large space—as if they had come out of the heroic youth of the world, that they set my blood a-tingling to look at them.

They were very nice to me too, though I knew that I only stood for the womankind that each had got at home and was soon to go back to, but none the less it was delightful to feel as if I were taking the first fruits of their love for them.

So it came to pass that within a few minutes I, who had been called insipid and was supposed to have no conversation, was chattering away softly and happily, making remarks about the things around me and asking all sorts of questions.

Of course I asked many foolish ones, which made the men laugh very much; but their laughter did not hurt me the least bit in the world, because everybody laughed on that ship, even the sailors who served the dishes, and especially one grizzly old salt, a cockney from Wapping, who for some unexplained reason was called Treacle.

It made me happy to see how they all deferred to Martin, saying: "Isn't that so, Doctor?" or "Don't you agree, Doctor?" and though it was strange and new to hear Martin (my "Mart of Spitzbergen") called "Doctor," it was also very charming.

After luncheon was over, and while coffee was being served, the commander sent Treacle to his cabin for a photograph of all hands which had been taken when they were at the foot of Mount Erebus; and when it came I was called upon to identify one by one, the shaggy, tousled, unkempt, bearded, middle-aged men in the picture with the smart, clean-shaven young officers who sat round me at the table.

Naturally I made shockingly bad shots, and the worst of them was when I associated Treacle with the commander, which made the latter rock in his seat and the former shake and shout so much that he spilled the coffee.

"But what about the fourth man in the front row from the left?" asked the commander.

"Oh, I should recognise him if I were blindfolded," I answered.

"By what?"

"By his eyes," I said, and after this truly Irish and feminine answer the men shrieked with laughter.

"She's got you there, doc," cried somebody.

"She has sure," said Martin, who had said very little down to that moment, but was looking supremely happy.

At length the time came for the men to go, and I went up on deck to see them off by the launch, and then nobody was left on the ship except Martin and myself, with the cook, the cabin-boy and a few of the crew, including Treacle.

I knew that that was the right time to speak, but I was too greedy of every moment of happiness to break in on it with the story of my troubles, so when Martin proposed to show me over the ship, away I went with him to look at the theodolites and chronometers and sextants, and sledges and skis, and the aeronautic outfit and the captive balloon, and the double-barrelled guns, and the place where they kept the petroleum and the gun cotton for blasting the ice, and the hold forward for the men's provisions in hermetically-sealed tins, and the hold aft for the dried fish and biscuit that were the food for the Siberian dogs, and the empty cage for the dogs themselves, which had just been sent up to the Zoo to be taken care of.

Last of all he showed me his own cabin, which interested me more than anything else, being such a snug little place (though I thought I should like to tidy it up a bit), with his medical outfit, his books, his bed like a shelf, and one pretty photograph of his mother's cottage with the roses growing over it, that I almost felt as if I would not mind going to the Antarctic myself if I could live in such comfortable quarters.

Two hours passed in this way, though they had flown like five minutes, when the cabin-boy came to say that tea was served in the saloon, and then I skipped down to it as if the ship belonged to me. And no sooner had I screwed myself into the commander's chair, which was fixed to the floor at the head of the narrow table, and found the tea-tray almost on my lap, than a wave of memory from our childhood came sweeping back on me, and I could not help giving way to the coquetry which lies hidden in every girl's heart so as to find out how much Martin had been thinking of me.

"I'll bet you anything," I said, (I had caught Martin's style) "you can't remember where you and I first saw each other."

He could—it was in the little dimity-white room in his mother's house with its sweet-smelling "scraas" under the sloping thatch.

"Well, you don't remember what you were doing when we held our first conversation?"

He did—he was standing on his hands with his feet against the wall and his inverted head close to the carpet.

"But you've forgotten what happened next?"

He hadn't—I had invited William Rufus and himself into bed, and they had sat up on either side of me.

Poor William Rufus! I heard at last what had become of him. He had died of distemper soon after I was sent to school. His master had buried him in the back-garden, and, thinking I should be as sorry as he was for the loss of our comrade, he had set up a stone with an inscription in our joint names—all of his own inditing. It ran—he spelled it out to me—

"HERE LICE WILYAM ROOFUS WRECKTED
BY IZ OLE FRENS MARTIN CONRAD
AND MARY O'NEILL."

Two big blinding beads came into my eyes at that story, but they were soon dashed away by Martin who saw them coming and broke into the vernacular. I broke into it, too, (hardly knowing that the well of my native speech was still there until I began to tap it), and we talked of Tommy the Mate and his "starboard eye," called each other "bogh millish," said things were "middling," spoke of the "threes" (trees) and the "tunder" (thunder), and remembered that "our Big Woman was a wicked devil and we wouldn't trust but she'd burn in hell."

How we laughed! We laughed at everything; we laughed at nothing; we laughed until we cried; but I have often thought since that this was partly because we knew in our secret hearts that we were always hovering on the edge of tragic things.

Martin never once mentioned my husband or my marriage, or his letters to my father, the Bishop and Father Dan, which had turned out so terribly true; but we had our serious moments for all that, and one of them was when we were bending over a large chart which he had spread out on the table to show me the course of the ship through the Great Unknown, leaning shoulder to shoulder, so close that our heads almost touched, and I could see myself in his eyes as he turned to speak to me.

"You were a little under the weather yesterday, shipmate—what was the cause of it?" he asked.

"Oh, we . . . we can talk of that another time, can't we?" I answered, and then we both laughed again, goodness knows why, unless it was because we felt we were on the verge of unlocking the doors of each other's souls.

Oh that joyful, wonderful, heart-swelling day! But no day ever passed so quickly. At half-past six Martin said we must be going back, or I should be late for dinner, and a few minutes afterwards we were in the launch, which had returned to fetch us.

I had had such a happy time on the ship that as we were steaming off I kissed my hand to her, whereupon Treacle, who was standing at the top of the companion, taking the compliment to himself, returned the salute with affectionate interest, which sent Martin and me into our last wild shriek of laughter.

The return trip was just as delightful as the coming out had been, everything looking different the other way round, for the sunset was like a great celestial fire which had been lighted in the western sky, and the big darkening city seemed to have turned its face to it.

Martin talked all the way back about a scheme he had afoot for going down to the region of the Pole again in order to set up some machinery that was to save life and otherwise serve humanity, and while I sat close up to him, looking into his flashing eyes—they were still as blue as the bluest sea—I said, again and again: "How splendid! How glorious! What a great, great thing it will be for the world."

"Won't it?" he said, and his eyes sparkled like a boy's.

Thus the time passed without our being aware how it was going, and we were back at Westminster Pier before I bethought me that of the sad and serious subject I had intended to speak about I had said nothing at all.

But all London seemed to have been taking holiday that day, for as we drove in a taxi up Parliament Street streams of vehicles full of happy people were returning from the Derby, including costers' donkey carts in which the girls were carrying huge boughs of May blossom, and the boys were wearing the girls' feathery hats, and at the top of their lusty lungs they were waking the echoes of the stately avenue with the "Honeysuckle and the Bee."

"Yew aw the enny, Oi em ther bee,
Oi'd like ter sip ther enny from those red lips, yew see."

As we came near our hotel we saw a rather showy four-in-hand coach, called the "Phœbus," drawing up at the covered way in front of it, and a lady on top, in a motor veil, waving her hand to us.

It was Alma, with my husband's and Mr. Eastcliff's party back from the races, and as soon as we met on the pavement she began to pay me high compliments on my improved appearance.

"Didn't I say the river air would do you good, dearest?" she said, and then she added something else, which would have been very sweet if it had been meant sweetly, about there being no surer way to make a girl beautiful than to make her happy.

There was some talk of our dining together that night, but I excused myself, and taking leave of Martin, who gave my hand a gentle pressure, I ran upstairs without waiting for the lift, being anxious to get to my own room that I might be alone and go over everything in my mind.

I did so, ever so many times, recalling all that had been said and done by the commander and his comrades, and even by Treacle, but above all by Martin, and laughing softly to myself as I lived my day over again in a world of dream.

My maid came in once or twice, with accounts of the gorgeous Derby dinner that was going on downstairs, but that did not matter to me in the least, and as soon as I had swallowed a little food I went to bed early—partly in order to get rid of Price that I might go over everything again and yet again.

I must have done so far into the night, and even when the wings of my memory were weary of their fluttering and I was dropping off at last, I thought I heard Martin calling "shipmate," and I said "Yes," quite loud, as if he had been with me still in that vague and beautiful shadow-land which lies on the frontier of sleep.

How mysterious, how magical, how wonderful!

Looking back I cannot but think it strange that even down to that moment I did not really know what was happening to me, being only conscious of a great flood of joy. I cannot but think it strange that, though Nature had been whispering to me for months, I did not know what it had been saying. I cannot but think it strange that, though I had been looking for love so long without finding it, I did not recognise it immediately when it had come to me of itself.

But when I awoke early in the morning, very early, while the sunrise was filling my bedroom with a rosy flush, and the thought of Martin was the first that was springing from the mists of sleep to my conscious mind, and I was asking myself how it happened that I was feeling so glad, while I had so many causes for grief, then suddenly—suddenly as the sun streams through the cloud-scud over the sea—I knew that what had long been predestined had happened, that the wondrous new birth, the great revelation, the joyous mystery which comes to every happy woman in the world had come at last to me.

I was in love.

I was in love with Martin Conrad.

FIFTY-SECOND CHAPTER

My joy was short-lived. No sooner had I become aware that I loved Martin Conrad, than my conscience told me I had no right to do so. I was married, and to love another than my husband was sin.

It would be impossible to say with what terror this thought possessed me. It took all the sunlight out of my sky, which a moment before had seemed so bright. It came on me like a storm of thunder and lightning, sweeping my happiness into the abyss.

All my religion, everything I had been taught about the sanctity of the sacrament of marriage seemed to rise up and accuse me. It was not that I was conscious of any sin against my husband. I was thinking only of my sin against God.

The first effect was to make me realise that it was no longer possible for me to speak to Martin about my husband and

Alma. To do this now that I knew I loved him would be deceitful, mean, almost treacherous.

The next effect was to make me see that all thought of a separation must now be given up. How could I accuse my husband when I was myself in the same position? If he loved another woman, I loved another man.

In my distress and fright I saw only one means of escape either from the filthy burden to which I was bound or the consciousness of a sinful heart, and that was to cure myself of my passion. I determined to do so. I determined to fight against my love for Martin Conrad, to conquer it and to crush it.

My first attempt to do this was feeble enough. It was an effort to keep myself out of the reach of temptation by refusing to see Martin alone.

For three or four days I did my best to carry out this purpose, making one poor excuse after another, when (as happened several times a day) he came down to see me—that I was just going out or had just come in, or was tired or unwell.

It was tearing my heart out to deny myself so, but I think I could have borne the pain if I had not realised that I was causing pain to him also.

My maid, whose head was always running on Martin, would come back to my room, after delivering one of my lying excuses, and say:

"You should have seen his face, when I told him you were ill. It was just as if I'd driven a knife into him."

Everybody seemed to be in a conspiracy to push me into Martin's arms—Alma above all others. Being a woman she read my secret, and I could see from the first that she wished to justify her own conduct in relation to my husband by putting me into the same position with Martin.

"Seen Mr. Conrad to-day?" she would ask.

"Not to-day," I would answer.

"Really? And you such old friends! And staying in the same hotel, too!"

When she saw that I was struggling hard she reminded my husband of his intention of asking Martin to dinner, and thereupon a night was fixed and a party invited.

Martin came, and I was only too happy to meet him in company, though the pain and humiliation of the contrast between him and my husband and his friends, and the difference of the atmosphere in which he lived from that to which I thought I was doomed for ever, was almost more than I could bear.

I think they must have felt it themselves, for though their usual conversation was of horses and dogs and race-meetings, I noticed they were silent while Martin in his rugged, racy poetic way (for all explorers are poets) talked of the beauty of the great Polar night, the cloudless Polar day, the midnight calm and the moonlight on the glaciers, which was the loveliest, weirdest, most desolate, yet most entrancing light the world could show.

"I wonder you don't think of going back to the Antarctic, if it's so fascinating," said Alma.

"I do. Bet your life I do," said Martin, and then he told them what he had told me on the launch, but more fully and even more rapturously—the story of his great scheme for saving life and otherwise benefiting humanity.

For hundreds of years man, prompted merely by the love of adventure, the praise of achievement, and the desire to know the globe he lived on, had been shouldering his way to the hitherto inviolable regions of the Poles; but now the time had come to turn his knowledge to account.

"How?" said my husband.

"By putting himself into such a position," said Martin, "that he will be able to predict, six, eight, ten days ahead, the weather of a vast part of the navigable and habitable world—by establishing installations of wireless telegraphy as near as possible to the long ice-barrier about the Pole from which ice-floes and icebergs and blizzards come, so that we can say in ten minutes from the side of Mount Erebus to half the southern hemisphere, 'Look out. It's coming down,' and thus save millions of lives from shipwreck, and hundreds of millions of money."

"Splendid, by Jove!" said Mr. Eastcliff.

"Yes, ripping, by jingo!" said Mr. Vivian.

"A ridiculous dream!" muttered my husband, but not until Martin had gone, and then Alma, seeing that I was all aglow, said:

"What a lovely man! I wonder you don't see more of him, Mary, my love. He'll be going to the ends of the earth soon, and then you'll be sorry you missed the chance."

Her words hurt me like the sting of a wasp, but I could not resist them, and when some days later Martin called to take me to the Geographical Society, where his commander, Lieutenant ——— was to give an account of their expedition, I could not find it in my heart to refuse to go.

Oh, the difference of this world from that in which I had been living for the past six months! All that was best in England seemed to be there, the men who were doing the work of the world, and the women who were their wives and partners.

The theatre was like the inside of a dish, and I sat by Martin's side on the bottom row of seats, just in front of the platform and face to face with the commander.

His lecture, which was illustrated by many photographic lantern slides of the exploring party, (including the one that had been shown to me on the ship) was very interesting, but terribly pathetic; and when he described the hardships they had gone through in a prolonged blizzard on a high plateau, with food and fuel running low, and no certainty that they would ever see home again, I found myself feeling for Martin's hand to make sure that he was there.

Towards the end the commander spoke very modestly of himself, saying he could never have reached the 87th parallel if he had not had a crew of the finest comrades that ever sailed on a ship.

"And though they're all splendid fellows," he said, "there's one I can specially mention without doing any wrong to the rest, and that's the young doctor of our expedition—Martin Conrad. Martin has a scheme of his own for going down to the Antarctic again to make a great experiment in the interests of humanity, and if and when he goes I say, 'Good luck to him and God bless him!' "

At these generous words there was much applause, during which Martin sat blushing like a big boy when he is introduced to the girl friends of his sister.

As for me I did not think any speech could have been so beautiful, and I felt as if I could have cried for joy.

When I got back to the hotel I *did* cry, but it was for another reason. I was thinking of my father and wondering why he did not wait.

"Why, why, why?" I asked myself.

FIFTY-THIRD CHAPTER

NEXT day, Martin came rushing down to my sitting-room with a sheaf of letters in his hand, saying:

"That was jolly good of the boss, but look what he has let me in for?"

They were requests from various newspapers for portraits and interviews, and particularly from one great London journal for a special article to contain an account of the nature and object of the proposed experiment.

"What am I to do?" he said. "I'm all right for stringing gabble, but I couldn't *write* anything to save my soul. Now, you could. I'm sure you could. You could write like Robinson Crusoe. Why shouldn't you write the article and I'll tell you what to put into it?"

There was no resisting that. And down at the bottom of my secret heart I was glad of the excuse to my conscience that I could not any longer run away from Martin because I was necessary to help him.

So we sat together all day long, and though it was like shooting the rapids to follow Martin's impetuous and imaginative speech, I did my best to translate his disconnected outbursts into more connected words, and when the article was written and read aloud to him he was delighted.

"Stunning! Didn't I say you could write like Robinson Crusoe?"

In due course it was published and made a deep impression, for wherever I went people were talking of it, and though some said "Fudge!" and others, like my husband, said "Dreams!" the practical result was that the great newspaper started a public subscription with the object of providing funds for the realisation of Martin's scheme.

This brought him an immense correspondence, so that every morning he came down with an armful of letters and piteous appeals to me to help him to reply to them.

I knew it would be dangerous to put myself in the way of so much temptation, but the end of it was that day after day we sat together in my sitting-room, answering the inquiries of the sceptical, the congratulations of the convinced, and the offers of assistance that came from people who wished to join in the expedition.

What a joy it was! It was like the dawn of a new life to me. But the highest happiness of all was to protect Martin against himself, to save him from his over-generous impulses—in a word, to mother him.

Many of the letters he received were mere mendicancy. He was not rich, yet he could not resist a pitiful appeal, especially if it came from a woman, and it was as much as I could do to restrain him from ruining himself.

Sometimes I would see him smuggle a letter into his side pocket, with—

"H'm! That will do later."

"What is it?" I would ask.

"Oh, nothing, nothing!" he would answer.

"Hand it out, sir," I would say, and then I would find a fierce delight in sending six freezing words of refusal to some impudent woman who was trying to play upon the tender side of my big-hearted boy.

Oh, it was delightful! My whole being seemed to be renewed. If only the dear sweet hours could go on and on for ever!

Sometimes my husband and Alma would look in upon us at our work, and then, while the colour mounted to my eyes, Martin would say:

"I'm fishing with another man's floats, you see."

"I see," my husband would reply, fixing his monocle and showing his front teeth in a painful grin.

"Just what dear Mary loves, though," Alma would say. "I do believe she would rather be sitting in this sunless room, writing letters for Mr. Conrad, than wearing her coronet at a King's coronation."

"Just so, ma'am; there *are* women like that," Martin would answer, looking hard at her; and when she had gone, (laughing lightly but with the frightened look I had seen before) he would say, as if speaking to himself:

"I hate that woman. She's like a snake. I feel as if I want to put my foot on it."

At length the climax came. One day Martin rushed downstairs almost beside himself in his boyish joy, to say that all the money he needed had been subscribed, and that in honour of the maturing of the scheme the proprietor of the newspaper was to give a public luncheon at one of the hotels, and though no women were to be present at the "feed" a few ladies were to occupy seats in a gallery, and I was to be one of them.

I had played with my temptation too long by this time to shrink from the dangerous exaltation which I knew the occasion would cause, so when the day came I went to the hotel in a fever of pleasure and pride.

The luncheon was nearly over, the speeches were about to begin, and the ladies' gallery was buzzing like a hive of bees, when I took my seat in it. Two bright young American women sitting next to me were almost as excited as myself, and looking down at the men through a pair of opera-glasses they were asking each other which was Martin, whereupon my vanity, not to speak of my sense of possession, was so lifted up that I pointed him out to them, and then borrowed their glasses to look at the chairman.

He seemed to me to have that light of imagination in his eyes which was always blazing in Martin's, and when he began to speak I thought I caught the note of the same wild passion.

He said they were that day opening a new chapter in the wonderful book of man's story, and though the dangers of the great deep might never be entirely overcome, and the wind would continue to blow as it listed, yet the perils of the one and the movements of the other were going to be known to, and therefore checked by, the human family.

After that, and a beautiful tribute to Martin as a man, (that everybody who had met him had come to love him, and that there must be something in the great solitudes of the silent white world to make men simple and strong and great, as the sea made them staunch and true) he drank to the success of the expedition, and called on Martin to respond to the toast.

There was a great deal of cheering when Martin rose, but I was so nervous that I hardly heard it. He was nervous too, as I could plainly see, for after a few words of thanks, he began to fumble the sheets of a speech which he and I had prepared together, trying to read it, but losing his place and even dropping his papers.

Beads of perspiration were starting from my forehead and I knew I was making noises in my throat, when all at once Martin threw his papers on the table and said, in quite another voice:

"Ship-mates, I mean gentlemen, I never could write a speech in my life, and you see I can't read one, but I know what I want to say and if you'll take it as it comes here goes."

Then in the simple style of a sailor, not always even grammatical yet splendidly clear and bold and natural, blundering along as he used to do when he was a boy at school and could not learn his lessons, but with his blue eyes ablaze, he told of his aims and his expectations.

And when he came to the end he said:

"His lordship, the chairman, has said something about the good effects of the solitudes of Nature on a man's character. I can testify to that. And I tell you this—whatever you are when you're up here and have everything you want, it's wonderful strange the way you're asking the Lord to stretch out His hand and help you when you're down there, all alone and with an empty hungry stomach.

"I don't know where you were last Christmas Day, shipmates . . . I mean gentlemen, but I know where I was. I was in the 85th latitude, longitude 163, four miles south and thirty west of Mount Darwin. It was my own bit of an expedition that my commander has made too much of, and I believe in my heart my mates had had enough of it. When we got out of our sleeping bags that morning there was nothing in sight but miles and miles of rolling waves of snow, seven thousand feet up on a windy plateau, with glaciers full of crevasses shutting us off from the sea, and not a living thing in sight as far as the eye could reach.

"We were six in company and none of us were too good for Paradise, and one—he was an old Wapping sailor, we called him Treacle—had the name of being a shocking old rip ashore. But we remembered what day it was, and we wanted to feel that we weren't cut off entirely from the world of Christian men—our brothers and sisters who would be going to church at home. So I dug out my little prayer-book that my mother put in my kit going away, and we all stood round bare-headed in the snow—a shaggy old lot I can tell you, with chins that hadn't seen a razor for a month—and I read the prayers for the day, the first and second Vespers, and Laudate Dominum and then the De Profundis.

"I think we felt better doing that, but they say the comical and the tragical are always chasing each other, which can get in first, and it was so with us, for just as I had got to an end with the solemn words, 'Out of the depths we cry unto thee, O Lord, Lord hear our cry,' in jumps old Treacle in his thickest cockney, 'And Gawd bless our pore ole wives and sweethearts fur a-wye.' "

If Martin said any more nobody heard it. The men below were blowing their noses, and the women in the gallery were crying openly.

"Well, the man who can talk like that may open all my letters and telegrams," said one of the young American women, who was wiping her eyes without shame.

What I was doing, and what I was looking like, I did not know until the lady, who had lent me the opera-glasses leaned over to me and said:

"Excuse me, but are you his wife, may I ask?"

"Oh no, no," I said nervously and eagerly, but only God knows how the word went through and through me.

I had taken the wrong course, and I knew it. My pride, my joy, my happiness were all accusing me, and when I went to bed that night I felt as if I had been a guilty woman.

FIFTY-FOURTH CHAPTER

I TRIED to take refuge in religion. Every day and all day I humbly besought the pardon of heaven for the sin of loving Martin Conrad.

The little religious duties which I had neglected since my marriage (such as crossing myself at rising from the table) I began to observe afresh, and being reminded by Martin's story that I had promised my mother to say a De Profundis for her occasionally I now said one every day. I thought these exercises would bring me a certain relief, but they did not.

I searched my Missal for words that applied to my sinful state, and every night on going to bed I prayed to God to take from me all unholy thoughts, all earthly affections. But what was the use of my prayers when in the first dream of the first sleep I was rushing into Martin's arms?

It was true that my love for Martin was what the world would call a pure love; it had no alloy of any kind; but all the same I thought I was living in a condition of adultery—adultery of the heart.

Early every morning I went to mass, but the sense I used to have of returning from the divine sacrifice to the ordinary occupations of life with a new spirit and a clean heart I could feel no longer.

I went oftener to confession than I had done before—twice a week to begin with, then every other day, then every day. But the old joy, the sense of purity and cleansing, did not come. I thought at first the fault might be with my Confessor, for though I knew I was in the presence of God, the whispering voice behind the grating, which used to thrill me with a feeling of the supernatural, was that of a young man, and I asked myself what a young priest could know by experience of the deep temptations of human love.

This was at the new Cathedral at Westminster, so I changed to a little Catholic church in a kind of mews in Mayfair, and there my Confessor was an older man whose quivering voice seemed to search the very depths of my being. He was deeply alarmed at my condition and counselled me to pray to God night and day to strengthen me against temptation.

"The Evil One is besieging your soul, my child," he said. "Fight with him, my daughter."

I tried to follow my ghostly father's direction, but how hard it was to do so! Martin had only to take my hand and look into my eyes and all my good resolutions were gone in a moment.

As a result of the fierce struggle between my heart and my soul my health began to fail me. From necessity now, and not from design, I had to keep my room, but even there my love for Martin was always hanging like a threatening sword over my head.

My maid Price was for ever singing his praises. He was so bright, so cheerful, so strong, so manly; in fact, he was perfect, and any woman in the world might be forgiven if she fell in love with him.

Her words were like music in my ears, and sometimes I felt as if I wanted to throw my arms about her neck and kiss her. But at other moments I reproved her, telling her it was very wicked of her to think so much of the creature instead of fixing her mind on the Creator—a piece of counsel which made Price, who was all woman, open her sparkling black eyes in bewilderment.

Nearly every morning she brought me a bunch of flowers, which Martin had bought at Covent Garden, all glittering from the sunshine and damp with the dew. I loved to have them near me, but, finding they tempted me to think more tenderly of him who sent them, I always contrived by one excuse or another to send them into the sitting-room that they might be out of my sight at all events.

After a while Price, remembering my former artifice, began to believe that I was only pretending to be ill, in order to draw Martin on, and then taking a certain liberty with me, as with a child, she reproved me.

"If I were a lady I couldn't have the heart," she said, "I really couldn't. It's all very well for us women, but men don't understand such ways. They're only children, men are, when you come to know them."

I began to look upon poor Price as a honeyed fiend sent by Satan to seduce me, and to say the truth she sometimes acted up to the character. One day she said:

"If I was tied to a man I didn't love, and who didn't love me, and somebody else, worth ten of him was ready and waiting, I would take the sweet with the bitter, I would. We women must follow our hearts, and why shouldn't we?"

Then I scolded her dreadfully, asking if she had forgotten that she was speaking to her mistress, and a married woman; but all the while I knew that it was myself, not my maid, I was angry with, for she had only been giving voice to the thoughts that were secretly tormenting me.

I had been in bed about a week when Price came with a letter in her hand and a look of triumph in her black eyes and said:

"There, my lady! What did I tell you? You've had it all your own way and now you've driven him off. He has left the hotel and gone to live on his ship."

This frightened me terribly, and partly for that reason I ordered her out of the room, telling her she must leave me altogether if she ever took such liberties again. But I'm sure she saw me, as she was going through the door, take up Martin's letter, which I had thrown on to the table, and press it to my lips.

The letter was of no consequence. It was merely to tell me that he was going down to Tilbury for a few days, to take possession of his old ship in the name of his company, but it said in a postscript:

"If there's anything I can do for you, pass me the word and I'll come up like quick-sticks."

"What can I do? What can I do?" I thought. Everything my heart desired my soul condemned as sinful, and religion had done nothing to liberate me from the pains of my guilty passion.

All this time my husband and Alma were busy with the gaieties of the London season, which was then in full swing, with the houses in Mayfair being ablaze every night, the blinds up and the windows open to cool the overheated rooms in which men and women could be seen dancing in closely-packed crowds.

One night, after Alma and my husband had gone to a reception in Grosvenor Square, I had a sudden attack of heart-strain and had to be put to bed, whereupon Price, who had realised that I was really ill, told Hobson, my husband's valet, to go after his master and bring him back immediately.

"It'll be all as one, but I'll go if you like," said Hobson.

In half an hour he came back with my husband's answer, "Send for a doctor."

This put Price into a fever of mingled anger and perplexity, and not knowing what else to do she telegraphed to Martin on his ship, telling him that I was ill and asking what doctor she ought to call in to see me.

Inside an hour a reply came not from Tilbury but from Portsmouth saying:

"Call Doctor——of Brook Street. Am coming up at once."

All this I heard for the first time when Price, with another triumphant look, came into my bedroom flourishing Martin's telegram as something she had reason to be proud of.

"You don't mean to say that you telegraphed to Mr. Conrad?" I said.

"Why not?" said Price. "When a lady is ill and her husband pays no attention to her, and there's somebody else not far off who would give his two eyes to save her a pain in her little finger, what is a woman to do?"

I told her what she was *not* to do. She was not to call the doctor under any circumstances, and when Martin came she was to make it plain to him that she had acted on her own responsibility.

Towards midnight he arrived, and Price brought him into my room in a long ulster covered with dust. I blushed and trembled at sight of him, for his face betrayed the strain and anxiety he had gone through on my account, and when he smiled at seeing that I was not as ill as he had thought, I was ashamed to the bottom of my heart.

"You'll be sorry you've made such a long journey now that you see there's so little amiss with me," I said.

"Sorry?" he said. "By the holy saints, I would take a longer one every night of my life to see you looking so well at the end of it."

His blue eyes were shining like the sun from behind a cloud, and the cruellest looks could not have hurt me more.

I tried to keep my face from expressing the emotion I desired to conceal, and asked if he had caught a train easily from Portsmouth, seeing he had arrived so early.

"No. Oh no, there was no train up until eleven o'clock," he said.

"Then how did you get here so soon?" I asked, and though he would not tell me at first I got it out of him at last—he had hired a motor-car and travelled the ninety miles to London in two hours and a half.

That crushed me. I could not speak. I thought I should have choked. Lying there with Martin at arm's length of me, I was afraid of myself, and did not know what I might do next. But at last, with a great effort to control myself, I took his hand and kissed it, and then turned my face to the wall.

FIFTY-FIFTH CHAPTER

That was the beginning of the end, and when, next day towards noon, my husband came with drowsy eyes to make a kind of ungracious apology, saying he supposed the doctor had been sent for, I said:

"James, I want you to take me home."

"Home? You mean . . . Castle Raa?"

"Y-es."

He hesitated, and I began to plead with him, earnestly and eagerly, not to deny me what I asked.

"Take me home, I beg, I pray."

At length, seeming to think I must be homesick, he said:

"Well, you know my views about that God-forsaken place; but the season's nearly at an end, and I don't mind going back on one condition—that you raise no objection to my inviting a few friends to liven it up a bit?"

"It is your house," I said. "You must do as you please in it."

"Very good; that's settled," he said, getting up to go. "And I dare say it will do you no harm to be out of the way of all this church-going and confessing to priests, who are always depressing people even when they're not making mischief."

Hardly had my husband left me when Alma came into my sitting-room in the most affectionate and insincere of her moods.

"My poor, dear sweet child," she said. "If I'd had the least idea you were feeling so badly I shouldn't have allowed Jimmy to stay another minute at that tiresome reception. But how good it was of Mr. Conrad to come all that way to see you! That's what I call being a friend now!"

Then came the real object of her visit—I saw it coming.

"I hear you're to have a house-party at Castle Raa.

Jimmy's in his room writing piles of invitations. He has asked me and I should love to go, but of course I cannot do so without *you* wish it. Do you?"

What could I say? What I *did* say I scarcely know. I only know that at the next minute Alma's arms were round my neck, and she was saying:

"You dear, sweet, unselfish little soul! Come let me kiss you."

It was done. I had committed myself. After all what right had I to raise myself on a moral pinnacle now? And what did it matter, anyway? I was flying from the danger of my own infidelities, not to save my husband from his.

Price had been in the room during this interview and when it was over I was ashamed to look at her.

"I can't understand you, my lady; I really can't," she said.

Next day I wrote a little letter to Martin on the *Scotia* telling him of our change of plans, but forbidding him to trouble to come up to say good-bye, yet half hoping he would disregard my injunction.

He did. Before I left my bedroom next morning I heard his voice in the sitting-room talking to Price, who with considerable emphasis was giving her views of Alma.

When I joined him I thought his face (which had grown to be very powerful) looked hard and strained; but his voice was as soft as ever while he said I was doing right in going home and that my native air must be good for me.

"But what's this Price tells me—that Madame is going with you?"

I tried to make light of that, but I broke down badly, for his eyes were on me, and I could see that he thought I was concealing the truth.

For some minutes he looked perplexed, as if trying to understand how it came to pass that sickening, as he believed I was, at the sight of my husband's infidelities I was yet carrying the provocative cause of them away with me, and then he said again:

"I hate that woman. She's like a snake. I feel as if I want to put my foot on it. I will, too, one of these days—bet your life I will."

It hurt me to hide anything from him, but how could I tell him that it was not from Alma I was flying but from himself?

When the day came for our departure I hoped I might get away without seeing Martin again. We did get out of the hotel and into the railway station, yet no sooner was I seated in the carriage than (in the cruel war that was going on within me) I felt dreadfully down that he was not there to see me off.

But at the very last moment, just as Alma with her spaniel under her arm, and my husband with his terrier on a strap, were about to step into the train, up came Martin like a gust of mountain wind.

"Helloa!" he cried. "I shall be seeing you soon. Everything's settled about the expedition. We're to sail the first week in September, so as to get the summer months in the Antarctic. But before that I must go over to the island to say good-bye to the old folks, and I'll see you at your father's I suppose."

Then Alma gave my husband a significant glance and said:

"But, Mary, my love, wouldn't it be better for Mr. Conrad to come to Castle Raa? You won't be able to go about very much. Remember your delicate condition, you know."

"Of course, why of course," said my husband. "That's quite true, and if Mr. Conrad will do me the honour to accept my hospitality for a few days . . . "

It was what I wanted above everything on earth, and yet I said:

"No, no! It wouldn't be fair. Martin will be too busy at the last moment."

But Martin himself jumped in eagerly with:

"Certainly! Delighted! Greatest pleasure in the world."

And then, while Alma gave my husband a look of arch triumph to which he replied with a painful smile, Martin leaned over to me and whispered:

"Hush! I want to! I must!" though what he meant by that I never knew.

He continued to look at me with a tender expression until we said good-bye; but after the carriage door had been closed and the engine had throbbed, and the guard had whistled, I thought I had never seen his strong face so stern as when the train moved from the platform.

FIFTY-SIXTH CHAPTER

We reached Ellan towards the close of the following day. It was the height of the holiday season, and the island seemed to be ablaze with lights.

Two motor-cars were waiting for us at the pier, and in a little while we were driving out of Blackwater through congested masses of people who were rambling aimlessly through the principal streets.

Our way was across a stone bridge that crossed the harbour at its inner end, and then up a hill that led to a headland overlooking the sea. Within half an hour we drew up at a pair of large gate posts which were much decayed and leaning heavily out of the perpendicular.

The chauffeur of the first of our cars got down to open the gate, and after it had clashed to behind us, we began to ascend a very steep drive that was bordered by tall elm trees. It was now almost dark, and the rooks, which had not yet gone off to the mountains, were making their evening clamour.

"Well, my dear, you're at home at last, and much good may it do you," said my husband.

I made no answer to this ungracious speech, but Alma was all excitement.

"So this is Castle Raa! What a fascinating old place!" she said, and as we drove through the park she reached out of the car to catch a first glimpse of the broad terraces and winding ways to the sea which had been reflected in her memory since she was a child.

I felt no such anxiety. Never did a young bride approach the home of her husband with less curiosity, but as our motor-car toiled up the drive I could not help seeing the neglected condition of the land, with boughs of trees lying where they had fallen in the storms, as well as broken gates half off their hinges and swinging to the wind.

The house itself, when we came in sight of it, was a large castellated building with many lesser turrets and one lofty octagonal tower, covered entirely with ivy, which, being apparently unshorn for years, hung in long trailers down the walls, and gave the whole pile the appearance of a huge moss-covered rock of the sea planted on a promontory of the land.

As our car went thundering up to the great hall door nearly the whole of the servants and some of the tenant farmers (under the direction of the tall, sallow man who had been my husband's guardian in former days, and was now his steward) were waiting to welcome us, as well as Lady Margaret Anselm, who was still reserved and haughty in her manner, though pleasant enough with me.

My husband nodded to all, shook hands with some, presented Alma to his aunt as "one of Mary's old school friends," (a designation which, as I could see, had gone ahead of her) and then we passed into the house.

I found the inside corresponded with the outside in its appearance of neglect and decay, the big square hall having rusty and disjointed armour on its wainscotted walls and the mark of water on the floor, which had come from a glass dome over the well of the stairs, for it had rained while we were on the sea.

The drawing-room had faded curtains over the windows, faded velvet on the square sofa and stiff chairs, faded carpets, faded samplers, and faded embroidery on faded screens.

The dining-room (the sedate original of my father's rather garish copy) was a panelled chamber, hung round with rubicund portraits of the male O'Neills from the early ones of the family who had been Lords of Ellan down to the "bad Lord Raa," who had sworn at my grandmother on the high road.

I felt as if no woman could have made her home here for at least a hundred years, and I thought the general atmosphere of the house was that of the days when spendthrift noblemen, making the island a refuge from debt, spent their days in gambling and their nights in drinking bumpers from bowls of whiskey punch to the nameless beauties they had left "in town."

They were all gone, all dead as the wood of the worm-eaten wainscotting, but the sound of their noisy merry-making seemed to cling to the rafters still, and as I went up to my rooms the broad oaken staircase seemed to be creaking under their drunken footsteps.

My own apartments, to which Lady Margaret conducted me, were on the southern side of the house—a rather stuffy bedroom with walls covered by a kind of pleated chintz, and a boudoir with a stone balcony that had a flight of steps going down to a terrace of the garden, which overlooked a glen and had a far view of the sea.

On the opposite side of the landing outside (which was not immediately off the great staircase though open to the view of it) there was a similar suite of rooms which I thought might be my husband's, but I was told they were kept for a guest.

Being left alone I had taken off my outer things and was standing on my balcony, listening to the dull hum of the water in the glen, the rustle of the trees above it, the surge of the sea on the rocks below, the creaking of a rusty weathercock and the striking of a court-yard clock, when I also heard the toot and throb of another motor-car, and as soon as it came up I saw that it contained Aunt Bridget in the half-moon bonnet and Betsy Beauty, who was looking more than ever like a country belle.

When I went down to the drawing-room Lady Margaret was pouring out tea for them, and at sight of me Aunt Bridget cried:

"Sakes alive, here she is herself!"

"But how pale and pinched and thin!" said Betsy Beauty.

"Nonsense, girl, that's only natural," said my Aunt Bridget, with something like a wink; and then she went on to say that she had just been telling her ladyship that if I felt lonely and a little helpless on first coming home Betsy would be pleased to visit me.

Before I could reply my husband came in, followed shortly by Alma, who was presented as before, as "Mary's old school-fellow"; and then, while Betsy talked to Alma and my husband to his kinswoman, Aunt Bridget, in an undertone, addressed herself to me.

"You're that way, aren't you? . . . No? Goodness me, girl, your father *will* be disappointed!"

Just then a third motor-car came throbbing up to the house, and Betsy who was standing by the window cried:

"It's Uncle Daniel with Mr. Curphy and Nessy."

"Nessy, of course," said Aunt Bridget grumpily, and then she told me in a confidential whisper that she was a much-injured woman in regard to "that ungrateful step-daughter," who was making her understand the words of Scripture about the pang that was sharper than a serpent's tooth.

As the new-comers entered I saw that Nessy had developed an old maid's idea of smartness, and that my father's lawyer was more than ever like an over-fatted fish; but my father himself (except that his hair was whiter) was the same man still, with the same heavy step, the same loud voice and the same tempestuous gaiety.

"All here? Good! Glad to be home, I guess! Strong and well and hearty, I suppose? . . . Yes, sir, yes! I'm middling myself, sir. Middling, sir, middling!"

During these rugged salutations I saw that Alma, with the bad manners of a certain type of society woman, looked on with a slightly impertinent air of amused superiority, until she encountered my father's masterful eyes, which nobody in the world could withstand.

After a moment my father addressed himself to me.

"Well, gel," he said, taking me by the shoulders, as he did in Rome, "you must have cut a dash in Egypt, I guess. Made the money fly, didn't you? No matter! My gold was as good as anybody else's, and I didn't grudge it. You'll clear me of that, anyway."

Then there was some general talk about our travels, about affairs on the island (Mr. Curphy saying, with a laugh and a glance in my direction, that things were going so well with my father that if all his schemes matured he would have no need to wait for a descendant to become the "uncrowned King of Ellan"), and finally about Martin Conrad, whose great exploits had become known even in his native country.

"Extraordinary! Extraordinary!" said my father. "I wouldn't have believed it of him, I wouldn't really. Just a neighbour lad without a penny at him. And now the world's trusting him with fifty thousand pounds, they're telling me!"

"Well, many are called but few are chosen," said Mr. Curphy with another laugh.

After that, and some broken conversation, Aunt Bridget expressed a desire to see the house, as the evening was closing in and they must soon be going back.

Lady Margaret thereupon took her, followed by the rest of us, over the principal rooms of the Castle; and it was interesting to see the awe with which she looked upon everything—her voice dropping to a whisper in the dining-room, I remember, as if the scene of carousing of the old roysterers had been a sort of sanctuary.

My father, less impressed, saw nothing but a house in bad repair, and turning to my husband, who had been obviously ill at ease, he said:

"Go on like this much longer, son-in-law, and you'll be charging two-pence a head to look at your ruins. Guess I must send my architect over to see what he can do for you."

Then taking me aside he made his loud voice as low as he could and said:

"What's this your Aunt Bridget tells me? Nine months married and no sign yet? Tut, tut! That won't do, gel, that won't do."

I tried to tell him not to spend money on the Castle if he intended to do so in expectation of an heir, but my heart was in my mouth and what I really said I do not know. I only know that my father looked at me for a moment as if perplexed, and then burst into laughter.

"I see! I see!" he said. "It's a doctor you want. I must send Conrad to put a sight on you. It'll be all right, gel, it'll be all right! Your mother was like that when you were coming."

As we returned to the hall Betsy Beauty whispered that she was surprised Mr. Eastcliff had married, but she heard from Madame that we were to have a house-party soon, and she hoped I would not forget her.

Then Aunt Bridget, who had been eyeing Alma darkly, asked me who and what she was and where she came from, whereupon I (trying to put the best face on things) explained that she was the daughter of a rich New York banker. After that Aunt Bridget's countenance cleared perceptibly and she said:

"Ah, yes, of course! I thought she had a quality toss with her."

The two motor-cars had been drawn up to the door, and the two parties had taken their seats in them when my father, looking about him, said to my husband:

"Your garden is as rough as a thornbush, son-in-law. I must send Tommy the Mate to smarten it up a bit. So long! So long!"

At the next moment they were gone, and I was looking longingly after them. God knows my father's house had never been more than a stepmother's home to me, but at that moment I yearned to return to it and felt like a child who was being left behind at school.

What had I gained by running away from London? Nothing at all. Already I knew I had brought my hopeless passion with me.

And now I was alone.

FIFTY-SEVENTH CHAPTER

Next day Lady Margaret came to my room to say good-bye, telling me she had only stayed at Castle Raa to keep house and make ready for me, and must now return to her own home, which was in London.

I was sorry, for my heart had warmed to her, and when I stood at the door and saw her drive off with my husband to catch the afternoon steamer, I felt I had lost both sympathy and protection.

Alma's feelings were less troubled, and as we turned back into the house I could see that she was saying to herself:

"Thank goodness, *she's* gone away."

A day or two later Doctor Conrad came, according to my father's instructions, and I was glad to see his close-cropped iron-grey head coming up the stairs towards my room.

Naturally our first conversation was about Martin, who had written to tell his parents of our meeting in London and to announce his intended visit. It was all very exciting, and now his mother was working morning and night at the old cottage, to prepare for the arrival of her son. Such scrubbing and scouring! Such taking up of carpets and laying them down again, as if the darling old thing were expecting a prince!

"It ought to be Sunny Lodge indeed before she's done with it," said the Doctor.

"I'm sure it will," I said. "It always was, and it always will be."

"And how are we ourselves," said the doctor. "A little below par, eh? Any sickness? No? Nausea? No? Headache and a feeling of lassitude, then? No?"

After other questions and tests, the old doctor was looking puzzled, when, not finding it in my heart to keep him in the dark any longer, I told him there was nothing amiss with my health, but I was unhappy and had been so since the time of my marriage.

"I see," he said. "It's your mind and not your body that is sick?"

"Yes."

"I'll speak to Father Dan," he said. "Good-bye! God bless you!"

Less than half an hour after he had gone, Alma came to me in her softest mode, saying the doctor had said I was suffering from extreme nervous exhaustion and ought to be kept from worries and anxieties of every kind.

"So if there's anything I can do while I'm here, dearest, . . . such as looking after the house and the servants . . .

No, no, don't deny me; it will be a pleasure, I assure you. . . . So we'll say that's settled, shall we? . . . You dear, sweet darling creature!"

I was too much out of heart to care what happened, but inside two days I realised that Alma had taken possession of the house, and was ordering and controlling everything.

Apparently this pleased such of the servants as had anything to gain by it—the housekeeper in particular—for Alma was no skinflint and she was making my husband's money flow like water, but it was less agreeable to my maid, who said:

"This is a nice place to be sure, where the mistress takes no interest in anything, and the guest walks over everybody. She'll walk over the mistress herself before long—mark my word but she will."

It would be about a week after our arrival at Castle Raa that Price came to my room to say that a priest was asking for me, and he was such a strange-looking thing that she was puzzled to know if his face was that of a child, a woman or a dear old man.

I knew in a moment it must be Father Dan, so I went flying downstairs and found him in the hall, wearing the same sack coat (or so it seemed) as when I was a child and made cupboards of its vertical pockets, carrying the same funny little bag which he had taken to Rome and used for his surplice at funerals, and mopping his forehead and flicking his boots with a red print handkerchief, for the day was hot and the roads were dusty.

He was as glad to see me as I to see him, and when I asked if he would have tea, he said Yes, for he had walked all the way from the Presbytery, after fasting the day before; and when I asked if he would not stay overnight he said Yes to that, too, "if it would not be troublesome and inconvenient."

So I took his bag and gave it to a maid, telling her to take it to the guest's room on my landing, and to bring tea to my boudoir immediately.

But hardly had I taken him upstairs and we had got seated in my private room, when the maid knocked at the door to say that the housekeeper wished to speak with me, and on going out, and closing the door behind me, I found her on the landing, a prim little flinty person with quick eyes, thin lips and an upward lift of her head.

"Sorry, my lady, but it won't be convenient for his reverence to stay in the house to-night," she said.

"Why so?" I said.

"Because Madame has ordered all the rooms to be got ready for the house-party, and this one," (pointing to the guest's room opposite) "is prepared for Mr. and Mrs. Eastcliff, and we don't know how soon they may arrive."

I felt myself flushing up to the eyes at the woman's impudence, and it added to my anger that Alma herself was standing at the head of the stairs, looking on and listening. So with a little spurt of injured pride I turned severely on the one while really speaking to the other, and said:

"Be good enough to make this room ready for his reverence without one moment's delay, and please remember for the future, that I am mistress in this house, and your duty is to obey me and nobody else whatever."

As I said this and turned back to my boudoir, I saw that Alma's deep eyes had a sullen look, and I felt that she meant to square accounts with me some day; but what she did was done at once, for going downstairs (as I afterwards heard from Price) she met my husband in the hall, where, woman-like, she opened her battery upon him at his weakest spot, saying:

"Oh, I didn't know your wife was priest-ridden."

"Priest-ridden?"

"Precisely," and then followed an explanation of what had happened, with astonishing embellishments which made my husband pale with fury.

Meantime I was alone with Father Dan in my room, and while I poured out his tea and served him with bread and butter, he talked first about Martin (as everybody seemed to do when speaking to me), saying:

"He was always my golden-headed boy, and it's a mighty proud man I am entirely to hear the good news of him."

More of the same kind there was, all music to my ears, and then Father Dan came to closer quarters, saying Doctor Conrad had dropped a hint that I was not very happy.

"Tell your old priest everything, my child, and if there is anything he can do. . . . "

Without waiting for more words I sank to my knees at his feet, and poured out all my troubles—telling him my marriage had been a failure; that the sanctifying grace which he had foretold as the result of the sacrament of holy wedlock had not come to pass; that not only did I not love my husband, but my husband loved another woman, who was living here with us in this very house.

Father Dan was dreadfully distressed. More than once while I was speaking he crossed himself and said, "Lord and His Holy Mother love us;" and when I came to an end he began to reproach himself for everything, saying that he ought to have known that our lad (meaning Martin) did not write those terrible letters without being certain they were true, and that from the first day my husband came to our parish the sun had been darkened by his shadow.

"But take care," he said. "I've told nobody about the compact we made with your husband—nobody but our Blessed Lady herself—and you mustn't think of that as a way out of your marriage. No, nor of any other way, no matter what, which the world, and the children of the world, may talk about."

"But I can't bear it, I can't bear it," I cried.

"Hush! Hush! Don't say that, my daughter. Think of it as one of the misfortunes of life which we all have to suffer. How many poor women have to bear the sickness and poverty, not to speak of the drunkenness and death, of their husbands! Do they think they have a right to run away from all that—to break the sacred vows of their marriage on account of it? No, my child, no, and neither must you. Some day it will all come right. You'll see it will. And meantime by the memory of your mother—that blessed saint whom the Lord has made one of his own. . . ."

"Then what can I do?"

"Pray, my child, pray for strength to bear your trials and to resist all temptation. Say a rosary for the Blessed Virgin every morning before breaking your fast. I'll say a rosary, too. You'll see yet this is only God's love for you, and you'll welcome His holy will."

While my dear father and friend was counselling me so I heard my husband speaking in his loud, grating tones on the landing outside, and before I could rise from my knees he had burst open the door and entered the room.

His face was deadly white and he was like a man out of his right mind.

"Mary," he said, looking down at me where I knelt with my hands crossed on my bosom, "when did I give you permission to introduce a priest into my house? Isn't it enough for a man to have a wife who is a Catholic without having the church and its ministers shunted into his home without his permission?''

I was so taken aback by this furious assault that at first I could not speak, but Father Dan interposed to defend me, saying with beautiful patience, that his visit had been quite unexpected on my part, and that I had asked him to stay overnight only because he was an old man, and had had a long walk from his parish.

''I'm much obliged to your reverence,'' said my husband, who was quivering with fury, ''but my wife is perfectly capable of answering for herself without your assistance, and as for your parish you would have done better to stay there instead of coming to meddle in this one.''

''Aren't you measuring me by your own yard, sir?'' said Father Dan, and at that straight thrust my husband broke into ungovernable rage.

''Everybody knows what a Popish priest is,'' he said. ''A meddlesome busybody who pokes his nose into other men's secrets. But priest or no priest, I'll have no man coming to my house to make mischief between husband and wife.''

''Are you sure,'' said Father Dan, ''that some woman isn't in your house already, making mischief between wife and husband?''

That thrust too went home. My husband looked at me with flashing eyes and then said:

''As I thought! You've been sent for to help my wife to make a great to-do of her imaginary grievances. You're to stay in the house too, and before long we'll have you setting up as master here and giving orders to my servants! But not if I know it! . . . Your reverence, if you have any respect for your penitent, you'll please be good enough to leave my wife to *my* protection.''

I saw that Father Dan had to gulp down his gathering anger, but he only said:

''Say no more, my lord. No true priest ever comes between a man and the wife whom God has given him. It's his business to unite people, not to put them apart. As for this dear child, I have loved her since she was an infant in arms, and never so much as at the present speaking, so I don't need to learn my duty from one who appears to care no more for her than for the rind of a lemon. I'll go, sir,'' said the old man, drawing himself up like a wounded lion, ''but it's not to your protection I leave her—it's to that of God's blessed and holy love and will.''

My husband had gone before the last words were spoken, but I think they must have followed him as he went lunging down the stairs.

During this humiliating scene a hot flush of shame had come to my cheeks and I wanted to tell Father Dan not to let it grieve him, but I could do nothing but stoop and kiss his hand.

Meantime two or three of the servants had gathered on the landing at the sound of my husband's voice, and among them was the flinty housekeeper holding the Father's little bag, and she gave it back to him as he passed her.

Then, all being over, the woman came into my room, with an expression of victorious mischief in her eyes and said:

''Your ladyship had better have listened to them as knows, you see.''

I was too benumbed by that cruel stroke to reply, but Price said enough for both of us.

''If them as knows,'' she said, ''don't get out of this room inside two seconds they'll get their ugly faces slapped.''

I thought I had reached the end of my power of endurance, and that night, before going to bed, while my maid was taking down my hair, and I was thinking of Martin and asking myself if I should put up with my husband's brutalities any longer, I heard her say:

''If I were a lady married to the wrong man, I'd have the right one if I had to go through the divorce court for him.''

Now that was so exactly the thought that was running riot in my own tormented mind, that I flew at her like a wild cat, asking her how she dared to say anything so abominably wicked, and telling her to take her notice there and then.

But hardly had she left the room, when my heart was in my mouth again, and I was trembling with fear lest she should take me at my word and then the last of my friends would be gone.

FIFTY-EIGHTH CHAPTER

WITHIN the next few days the house-party arrived. There would be twenty of them at least, not counting valets and ladies' maids, so that large as Castle Raa was the house was full.

They were about equally divided as to sex and belonged chiefly to my husband's class, but they included Mr. Eastcliff's beautiful wife, Camilla, and Alma's mother, who, much to Alma's chagrin, had insisted upon being invited.

My husband required me to receive them, and I did so, though I was only their nominal hostess, and they knew it and treated me accordingly.

I should be ashamed to speak of the petty slights they put upon me, how they consulted Alma in my presence and otherwise wounded my pride as a woman by showing me that I had lost my own place in my husband's house.

I know there are people of the same class who are kind and considerate, guileless and pure, the true nobility of their country—women who are devoted to their homes and children, and men who spend their wealth and strength for the public good—but my husband's friends were not of that kind.

They were vain and proud, selfish, self-indulgent, thoroughly insincere, utterly ill-mannered, shockingly ill-informed, astonishingly ill-educated (capable of speaking several languages but incapable of saying a sensible word in any of them), living and flourishing in the world without religion, without morality, and (if it is not a cant phrase to use) without God.

What their conduct was when out shooting, picnicking, driving, riding, motoring, and yachting (for Mr. Eastcliff had arrived in his yacht, which was lying at anchor in the port below the glen), I do not know, for ' doctor's orders'' were Alma's excuse for not asking me to accompany them.

But at night they played bridge (their most innocent amusement), gambled and drank, banged the piano, danced ''Grizzly Bears,'' sang duets from the latest musical comedies, and then ransacked the empty houses of their idle heads for other means of killing the one enemy of their existence—Time.

Sometimes they would give entertainments in honour of their dogs, when all the animals of all the guests (there seemed to be a whole kennel of them) would be dressed up in coats of silk and satin with pockets and pocket-handkerchiefs, and then led downstairs to the drawing-room, where Alma's wheezy spaniel and my husband's peevish terrier were supposed to receive them.

Sometimes they would give ''freak dinners,'' when the guests themselves would be dressed up, the men in women's clothes, the women in men's, the male imitating the piping treble of the female voices, and the female the over-vowelled slang of the male, until, tiring of this foolishness, they would end up by flinging the food at the pictures on the walls, the usual pellet being softened bread and the favourite target the noses in the family portraits, which, hit and covered with a sprawling mess, looked so ridiculous as to provoke screams of laughter.

The talk at table was generally of horses and dogs, but sometimes it was of love, courtship and marriage, including conjugal fidelity, which was a favourite subject of ridicule, with both the women and the men.

Thus my husband would begin by saying (he often said it in my hearing) that once upon a time men took their wives as they took their horses, on trial for a year and a day, and "really with some women there was something to say for the old custom."

Then Mr. Vivian would remark that it was "a jolly good idea, by Jove," and if he "ever married, by the Lord that's just what he would do."

Then Mr. Eastcliff would say that it was a ridiculous superstition that a woman should have her husband all to herself, "as if he were a kind of toothbrush which she could not share with anybody else," and somebody would add that she might as reasonably want her dentist or her hairdresser to be kept for her own use only.

After that the ladies, not to be left behind, would join in the off-hand rattle, and one of them would give it as her opinion that a wife might have an incorrigibly unfaithful husband, and yet be well off.

"Ugh!" said Alma one night, shrugging her shoulders. "Think of a poor woman being tied for life to an entirely faithful husband!"

"I adore the kind of man who goes to the deuce for a woman—Parnell, and Gambetta and Boulanger and that sort," said a "smart" girl of three or four-and-twenty, whereupon Camilla Eastcliff (she was a Russian) cried:

"That's vhy the co-respondents in your divorce courts are so sharming. They're like the villayns in the plays—always so dee-lightfully vicked."

Oh, the sickening horror of it all! Whether it was really moral corruption or only affectation and pose, it seemed equally shocking, and though I bore as much of it as I could with a cheerful face, I escaped as often as possible to the clean atmosphere of my own room.

But even there I was not always allowed to be alone, for Alma's mother frequently followed me. She was a plump little person in a profuse ornamentation of diamond rings and brooches, with little or no education, and a reputation for saying risky things in blundering French whereof the principal humour lay in the uncertainty as to whether she knew their meaning or not.

Nevertheless she was the only good-hearted woman in the house, and I really believe she thought she was doing a kind act in keeping me company. But oh, how I suffered from her long accounts of her former "visits" to my house, whereby I learned, without wishing to, what her origin had been (the daughter of a London postman); what position she had held in Castle Raa in her winsome and reckless youth (one that need not be defined); how she had met her husband in New York and he had married her to save the reputation of his child; and finally how the American ladies of society had refused to receive her, and she had vowed to be revenged on them by marrying Alma to the highest title in Europe that could be bought with money.

"I was just like your father, my dear. I never did no manner of harm to those people. They used to think I thought myself better blood nor they were, but I never thought no such thing, I assure you. Only when they turned nasty after my marriage I made up my mind—just as your father did—as Alma should marry a bigger husband nor any of them, even if he wasn't worth a dime and 'adn't a 'air on 'is 'ead."

But even these revelations about herself were less humiliating than her sympathy with me, which implied that I was not fitted to be mistress of a noble house—how could it be expected of me?—whereas Alma was just as if she had been born to it, and therefore it was lucky for me that I had her there to show me how to do things.

"Alma's gotten such *ton!* Such distangy manners!" she would say.

The effect of all this was to make me feel, as I had never felt before, the intolerable nature of the yoke I was living under. When I looked into the future and saw nothing before me but years of this ignoble bondage, I told myself that nothing—no sacrament or contract, no law of church or state—could make me endure it.

From day to day my maid came to me with insidious hints about Alma and my husband. I found myself listening to them. I also found myself refreshing my memory of the hideous scene in Paris, and wondering why I had condoned the offence by staying an hour longer under my husband's protection.

And then there was always another force at work within me—my own secret passion. Though sometimes I felt myself to be a wretched sinner and thought the burden I had to bear was heaven's punishment for my guilty love, at other times my whole soul rose in revolt, and I cried out not merely for separation from my husband but for absolute sundering.

Twice during the painful period of the house-party I heard from Martin. His first letter was full of accounts of the far-reaching work of his expedition—the engaging of engineers, electricians, geologists and masons, and the shipping of great stores of wireless apparatus—for his spirits seemed to be high, and life was full of good things for him.

His second letter told me that everything was finished, and he was to visit the island the next week, going first to "the old folks" and coming to me for a few days immediately before setting sail.

That brought matters to a head, and compelled me to take action.

It may have been weak of me, but not wanting a repetition of the scene with Father Dan, (knowing well that Martin would not bear it with the same patience) I sent the second letter to Alma, asking if the arrangement would be agreeable. She returned it with the endorsement (scribbled in pencil across the face), "Certainly; anything to please *you*, dear."

I submitted even to that. Perhaps I was a poor-spirited thing, wanting in proper pride, but I had a feeling that it was not worth while to waste myself in little squibs of temper, because an eruption was coming (I was sure of that) in which Martin would be concerned on my side, and then everybody and everything would be swept out of the path of my life for ever.

Martin came. In due course I read in the insular newspapers of his arrival on the island—how the people had turned out in crowds to cheer him at the pier, and how, on reaching our own village the neighbours (I knew the names of all of them) had met him at the railway station and taken him to his mother's house, and then lighted fires on the mountains for his welcome home.

It cut me to the heart's core to think of Martin amid thrilling scenes like those while I was here among degrading scenes like these. My love for Martin was now like a wound and I resolved that, come what might, before he reached Castle Raa I should liberate myself from the thraldom of my false position.

Father Dan's counsels had faded away by this time. Though I had prayed for strength to bear my burden there had been no result, and one morning, standing before the figure of the Virgin in my bedroom, I felt an impulse to blow out her lamp and never to light it again.

The end of it all was that I determined to see the Bishop and my father's advocate, Mr. Curphy, and perhaps my father himself, that I might know one way or the other where I was, and what was to become of me. But how to do this I could not see, having a houseful of people who were nominally my guests.

Fortune—ill-fortune—favoured me. News came that my father had suddenly fallen ill of some ailment that puzzled the doctors, and making this my reason and excuse I spoke to my husband, asking if I might go home for two or three days.

"Why not?" he said, in the tone of one who meant, "Who's keeping you?"

Then in my weakness I spoke to Alma, who answered:

"Certainly, my sweet girl. We shall miss you *dreadfully*, but it's your duty. And then you'll see that *dear* Mr. . . . What d'ye callum?"

Finally, feeling myself a poor, pitiful hypocrite, I apologised for my going away to the guests also, and they looked as if they might say: "We'll survive it, perhaps."

The night before my departure my maid said:

"Perhaps your ladyship has forgotten that my time's up, but I'll stay until you return if you want me to."

I asked her if she would like to stay with me altogether and she said:

"Indeed I should, my lady. Any woman would like to stay with a good mistress, if she *is* a little quick sometimes. And if you don't want me to go to your father's I may be of some use to you here before you come back again."

I saw that her mind was still running on divorce, but I did not reprove her now, for mine was turning in the same direction.

Next morning most of the guests came to the hall door to see me off, and they gave me a shower of indulgent smiles as the motor-car moved away.

FIFTY-NINTH CHAPTER

Before going to my father's house I went to the Bishop's. Bishop's Court is at the other side of the island, and it was noon before I drove under its tall elm trees, in which a vast concourse of crows seemed to be holding a sort of general congress.

The Bishop was then at his luncheon, and after luncheon (so his liveried servant told me) he usually took a siesta. I have always thought it was unfortunate for my interview that it came between his food and his sleep.

The little reception-room into which I was shown was luxuriously, not to say gorgeously, appointed, with easy chairs and sofas, a large portrait of the Pope, signed by the Holy Father himself, and a number of pictures of great people of all kinds—dukes, marquises, lords, counts—as well as photographs of fashionable ladies in low dress inscribed in several languages to "My dear Father in God the Lord Bishop of Ellan."

The Bishop came to me after a few minutes, smiling and apparently at peace with all the world. Except that he wore a biretta he was dressed—as in Rome—in his long black soutane with its innumerable buttons, his silver-buckled shoes, his heavy gold chain and jewelled cross.

He welcomed me in his smooth and suave manner, asking if he could offer me a little refreshment; but, too full of my mission to think of eating and drinking, I plunged immediately into the object of my visit.

"Monsignor," I said, "I am in great trouble. It is about my marriage."

The smile was smitten away from the Bishop's face by this announcement.

"I am sorry," he said. "Nothing serious, I trust?"

I told him it was very serious, and straightway I began on the spiritual part of my grievance—that my husband did not love me, that he loved another woman, that the sacred sacrament of my marriage. . . .

"Wait," said the Bishop, and he rose to close the window, for the clamour of the crows was deafening—a trial must have been going on in the trees. Returning to his seat he said:

"Dear lady, you must understand that there is one offence, and only one, which in all Christian countries and civilised communities is considered sufficient to constitute a real and tangible grievance. Have you any evidence of that?"

I knew what he meant and I felt myself colouring to the roots of my hair. But gulping down my shame I recounted the story of the scene in Paris and gave a report of my maid's charges and surmises.

"Humph!" said the Bishop, and I saw in a moment that he was going to belittle my proofs.

"Little or no evidence of your own, apparently. Chiefly that of your maid. And ladies' maids are notorious mischief-makers."

"But it's true," I said. "My husband will not deny it. He cannot."

"So far as I am able to observe what passes in the world," said the Bishop, "men in such circumstances always can and do deny it."

I felt my hands growing moist under my gloves. I thought the Bishop was trying to be blind to what he did not wish to see.

"But I'm right, I'm sure I'm right," I said.

"Well, assuming you *are* right, what is it, dear lady, that you wish me to do?"

For some minutes I felt like a fool, but I stammered out at length that I had come for his direction and to learn what relief the Church could give me.

"H'm!" said the Bishop, and then crossing one leg over the other, and fumbling the silver buckle of his shoe, he said:

"The Church, dear lady, does indeed provide alleviation in cases of dire necessity. It provides the relief of separation—always deploring the necessity and hoping for ultimate reconciliation. But to sanction the separation of a wife from her husband because—pardon me, I do not say this is your case—she finds that he does not please her, or because—again I do not say this is your case—she fancies that somebody else pleases her better. . . ."

"Monsignor," I said, feeling hot and dizzy, "we need not discuss separation. I am thinking of something much more serious."

Never shall I forget the expression of the Bishop's face. He looked aghast.

"My good lady, surely you are not thinking of divorce?"

I think my head must have dropped as in silent assent, for in a peremptory and condemnatory manner the Bishop took me to task, asking if I did not know that the Catholic Church did not recognise divorce under any circumstances, and if I had forgotten what the Holy Father himself (pointing up to the portrait) had said to me—that when I entered into the solemn contract of holy matrimony I was to do so in the full consciousness that it could not be broken but by death.

"The love in which husband and wife contract to hold each other in holy wedlock is typified by the love of Christ for His Church, and as the one can never be broken, neither can the other."

"But my husband does not love me," I said. "Neither do I love him, and therefore the contract between us is broken already."

The Bishop was very severe with me for this, telling me that as a good child of the Church, I must never, never say that again, for though marriage was a contract it differed from all other contracts whatsoever.

"When you married your husband, dear lady, you were bound to him not by your own act alone, but by a mysterious power from which neither of you can ever free yourself. The power that united you was God, and whom God has joined together no man may put asunder."

I felt my head drooping. The Bishop was saying what I had always been taught, though in the torment of my trouble and the fierce fire of my temptation I had forgotten it.

"The civil law *might* divorce you," continued the Bishop. "I don't know—I can say nothing about that. But it would have *no right* to do so because the law can have no right to undo what God Himself has done."

Oh, it was cruel! I felt as if the future of my life were darkening before me—as if the iron bars of a prison were closing upon me, and fetters were being fixed on every limb.

"But even if the civil law *could* and *would* divorce you," said the Bishop, "think of the injury you would be inflicting on the Church. Yours was what is called a mixed marriage, and the Church does not favour such marriages, but it consented in this case, and why? Because it hoped to bring back an erring family in a second generation to the fold of the faith. Yet what would you be doing? Without waiting for a second generation you would be defeating its purpose."

A cold chill seemed to creep to my heart at these words.

Was it the lost opportunity the Bishop was thinking of, instead of the suffering woman with her bruised and bleeding soul?

I rose to go. The Bishop rose with me, and began to counsel forgiveness.

"Even if you *have* suffered injury, dear lady," he said—"I don't say you haven't—isn't it possible to forgive? Remember, forgiveness is a divine virtue, enjoined on us all, and especially on a woman towards the man she has married. Only think! How many women have to practise it—every day, all the world over!"

"Ah, well!" I said, and walked to the door.

The Bishop walked with me, urging me, as a good daughter of the Church, to live at peace with my husband, whatever his faults, and when my children came (as please God they would) to "instil into them the true faith with all a mother's art, a mother's tenderness," so that the object of my marriage might be fulfilled, and a good Catholic become the heir to Castle Raa.

"So the Church can do nothing for me?" I said.

"Nothing but pray, dear lady," said the Bishop.

When I left him my heart was in fierce rebellion; and, since the Church could do nothing, I determined to see if the law could do anything, so I ordered my chauffeur to drive to the house of my father's advocate at Holmtown.

The trial in the trees was over by this time, and a dead crow tumbled from one of the tall elms as we passed out of the grounds.

Holmtown is a little city on the face of our bleak west coast, dominated by a broad stretch of sea, and having the sound of the waves always rumbling over it. Mr. Curphy's house faced the shore and his office was an upper room plainly furnished with a writing desk, a deal table, laden with law books and foolscap papers, a stiff arm-chair, covered with American leather, three or four coloured engravings of judges in red and ermine, a photograph of the lawyer himself in wig and gown, an illuminated certificate of his membership of a legal society, and a number of lacquered tin boxes, each inscribed with the name of a client—the largest box bearing the name of "Daniel O'Neill."

My father's advocate received me with his usual bland smile, gave me his clammy fat hand, put me to sit in the arm-chair, hoped my unexpected visit did not presage worse news from the Big House, and finally asked me what he could do.

I told my story over again, omitting my sentimental grievances and coming quickly, and with less delicacy, to the grosser facts of my husband's infidelity.

The lawyer listened with his head aside, his eyes looking out on the sea and his white fingers combing his long brown beard, and before I had finished I could see that he too, like the Bishop, had determined to see nothing.

"You may be right," he began. . . .

"I *am* right!" I answered.

"But even if you *are,* I am bound to tell you that adultery is not enough of itself as a ground for divorce."

"Not enough?"

"If you were a man it would be, but being a woman you must establish cruelty as well."

"Cruelty? Isn't it all cruelty?" I asked.

"In the human sense, yes; in the legal sense, no," answered the lawyer.

And then he proceeded to explain to me that in this country, unlike some others, before a woman could obtain a divorce from her husband she had to prove that he had not only been unfaithful to her, but that he had used violence to her, struck her in the face perhaps, threatened her or endangered her life or health.

"Your husband hasn't done that, has he? No? I thought not. After all he's a gentleman. Therefore there is only one other ground on which you could establish a right to divorce, namely desertion, and your husband is not likely to run away. In fact, he couldn't. It isn't to his interest. We've seen to all that—*here,*" and smiling again, the lawyer patted the top of the lacquered box that bore my father's name.

I was dumbfounded. Even more degrading than the fetters whereby the Church bound me to my marriage were the terms on which the law would release me.

"But assuming that you *could* obtain a divorce," said the lawyer, "what good would it do you? You would have to relinquish your title."

"I care nothing about my title," I replied.

"And your position."

"I care nothing about that either."

"Come, come," said the lawyer, patting my arm as if I had been an angry child on the verge of tears. "Don't let a fit of pique or spleen break up a marriage that is so suitable from the points of property and position. And then think of your good father. Why did he spend all that money in setting a ruined house on its legs again? That he might carry on his name in a noble family, and through your children, and your children's children. . . .''

''Then the law can do nothing for me?'' I said, feeling sick and sore.

''Sorry, very sorry, but under present conditions, as far as I can yet see, nothing,'' said the lawyer.

''Good-day, sir,'' I said, and before he could have known what I was doing I had leapt up, left the room, and was hurrying downstairs.

My heart was in still fiercer rebellion now. I would go home. I would appeal to my father. Hard as he had always been with me he was at least a man, not a cold abstraction, like the Church and the law, without bowels of compassion or sense of human suffering.

SIXTIETH CHAPTER

Although I had sent word that I was coming home, there was no one to welcome me when I arrived.

Aunt Bridget was out shopping, and Betsy Beauty (in the sulks with me, as I afterwards heard, for not asking her to the house-party) had run upstairs on hearing our horn, so I went direct to my father's room.

Nessy MacLeod answered my knock, but instead of opening the door to let me in, she slid out like a cat and closed it behind her. Never had her ungainly figure, her irregular features, and her red head seemed to me so repugnant. I saw at once that she was giving herself the airs of housekeeper, and I noticed that she was wearing the bunch of keys which used to dangle from Aunt Bridget's waist when I was a child.

''Your father is ill,'' she said.

I told her I knew that, and it was one of the reasons I was there.

''Seriously ill,'' she said, standing with her back to the door. ''The doctor says he is to be kept perfectly quiet.''

Indignant at the effrontery of the woman who was trying to keep me out of my father's room, I said:

''Let me pass, please.''

''S'sh! He has a temperature, and I don't choose that anybody shall disturb him to-day.''

''Let me pass,'' I repeated, and I must have pitched my voice so high that my father heard it.

"Is that Mary?" came from the other side of the door, whereupon Nessy beat a retreat, and at the next moment I was in my father's room.

His massive and powerful head was propped up with pillows in the camp-bed which was all he ever slept on, and he was looking so ill and changed in so short a time that I was shocked, as well as ashamed at the selfishness of having thought only of myself all the morning.

But he would listen to no sympathy, protesting there was little or nothing the matter with him, that "Conrad was croaking about cancer," but the doctor was a fool.

"What about yourself, though?" he said. "Great doings at the Castle, they're telling me."

I thought this a favourable opportunity to speak about my own affairs, so I began on my story again, and though I found it harder to tell now that my listener was my father, I struggled on and on, as well as I could for the emotion that was choking me.

I thought he would pity me. I expected him to be angry. Although he was showing me some of the contemptuous tenderness which he had always assumed towards my mother, yet I was his daughter, and I felt sure that he would want to leap out of bed that he might take my husband by the throat and shake him as a terrier shakes a rat. But what happened was something quite different.

Hardly had I begun when he burst out laughing.

"God bless my soul," he cried, "you're never going to lose your stomach over a thing like that?"

I thought he had not understood me, so I tried to speak plainer.

"I see," he said. "Sweethearting some other woman, is he? Well, what of it? He isn't the first husband who has done the like, and I guess he won't be the last."

Still I thought I had not made myself clear, so I said my husband had been untrue to me, that his infidelities under my own roof had degraded me in my own eyes and everybody else's, that I could not bear to live such a life any longer and consequently . . .

"Consequently," said my father, "you come to me to fight your battles for you. No, no, fight them yourself, gel. No father-in-law ought to interfere."

It was a man's point of view I suppose, but I was ready to cry with vexation and disappointment, and though I conquered the impulse to do that I could go no farther.

"Who's the woman?" he asked.

I told him it was one of our house-party.

"Then cut her out. I guess you're clever enough to do it, whoever she is. You've got the looks too, and I don't grudge you the money. Cut her out—that's the best advice I can give you. Make your husband see you're the better woman of the two. Cut her out, I'm saying, and don't come whining here like a cry-baby, who runs to her grandmother's apron-strings at the first scratch she gets outside."

He had been reaching forward, but he now fell back on his pillows, saying:

"I see how it is, though. Women without children are always vapouring about their husbands, as if married life ought to be a garden of Eden. One woman, one man, and all the rest of the balderdash. I sot your Aunt Bridget on you before, gel, and I'll have to do it again I'm thinking. But go away now. If I'm to get better I must have rest. Nessy!" (calling) "I've a mort o' things to do and most everything is on my shoulders. Nessy! My medicine! Nessy! Nessy! Where in the world has that girl gone to?"

"I'm here, Daniel," said Nessy McLeod coming back to the room; and as I went out and passed down the corridor, with a crushed and broken spirit and the tears ready to gush from my eyes, I heard her coaxing him in her submissive and insincere tones, while he blamed and scolded her.

Half an hour afterwards Aunt Bridget came to me in my mother's room. Never in my life before had I been pleased to see her. She, at least, would see my situation with a woman's eyes. But I was doomed to another disappointment.

"Goodness me, girl," she cried, "what's this your father tells me? One of your own guests, is it? That one with the big eyes I'll go bail. Well, serve you right, I say, for bringing a woman like that into the house with your husband—so smart and such a quality toss with her. If you were lonely coming home why didn't you ask your aunt or your first cousin? There would have been no trouble with your husband then—not about me at all events. But what are you thinking of doing?"

"Getting a divorce," I answered, firmly, for my heart was now aflame.

If I had held a revolver in Aunt Bridget's face she could not have looked more shocked.

"Mary O'Neill, are you mad?" she cried. "Divorce indeed! No woman of our family has ever disgraced herself like that. What will your father say? What's to happen to Betsy Beauty? What are people going to think about me?''

I answered that I had not made my marriage, and those who *had* made it must take the consequences.

''What does that matter now? Hundreds of thousands of women have married the wrong man of their own free will, but if every woman who has made a rue-bargain were to try to get out of it your way where would the world be, I wonder? Perhaps you think you could marry somebody else, but you couldn't. What decent man wants to marry a divorced woman even if she *is* the injured party?''

''Then you think I ought to submit—tamely submit to such infidelities?'' I asked.

''Sakes alive,'' said Aunt Bridget, ''what else can you do? Men are polygamous animals, and we women have to make up our minds to it. Goodness knows I had to when the old colonel used to go hanging around those English barmaids at the 'Cock and Hen.' Be a little blind, girl—that's what nine wives out of ten have to be every day and every night and all the world over.''

''Will that make my husband any better?'' I asked.

''I don't say it will,'' said Aunt Bridget. ''It will make *you* better, though. What the eye doesn't see the heart doesn't grieve for. That's something, isn't it?''

When I went to bed that night my whole soul was in revolt. The Church, the law, society, parental power, all the conventions and respectabilities seemed to be in a conspiracy to condone my husband's offence and to make me his scapegoat, doomed to a life of hypocrisy and therefore immorality and shame. I would die rather than endure it. Yes, I would die that very day rather than return to my husband's house and go through the same ordeal again.

But next morning when I thought of Martin, as I always did on first awakening, I told myself that I would live and be a clean woman in my own eyes *whatever the World might think of me.*

Martin was now my only refuge, so I would tell him everything. It would be hard to do that, but no matter, I would crush down my modesty and tell him everything. And then, whatever he told me to do I should do it.

I knew quite well what my resolution meant, what it implied and involved, but still I thought, *"Whatever he tells me to do I will do it."*

I remembered what the Countess in Rome had said about a life of "complete emancipation" as an escape from unhappy marriage, and even yet I thought *"Whatever he tells me to do I will do it."*

After coming to that conclusion I felt more at ease and got up to dress.

It was a beautiful morning, and I looked down into the orchard, where the apples were reddening under the sunshine and the gooseberries were ripening under their hanging boughs, when in the quiet summer air I heard a footstep approaching.

An elderly woman in an old-fashioned quakerish bonnet was coming up the drive. She carried a little bunch of red and white roses, and her face, which was very sweet and simple, wore the pathetic expression of a child in trouble.

It was Martin's mother. She was coming to see me, and at the first sight of her something told me that my brave resolution was about to be broken, and I was going to be shaken to the depths of my being.

I heard the bell of the front door ringing. After a moment a maid came up and said:

"Mrs. Doctor Conrad has called to see your ladyship."

"Bring her here," I answered.

My heart was in my mouth already.

SIXTY-FIRST CHAPTER

When Martin's mother came into the room she looked nervous and almost frightened, as if she had charged herself with a mission which she was afraid to fulfil. But I put her to sit in my mother's easy chair and sat on the arm of it myself, and then she seemed calmer and more comfortable.

In spite of the silver threads in the smooth hair under her poke bonnet her dear face was still the face of a child, and never before had it seemed to me so helpless and childlike.

After a moment we began to talk of Martin. I said it must be a great happiness to her to have him back after his long and perilous voyage; and she answered that it was, but his visit was so short, only four days altogether, although the doctor and she had looked forward to it so long.

"That's not Martin's fault, though," she said. "He's such a good son. I really, really think no mother ever had such a good son. But when children grow up they can't always be thinking of the old people, can they? That's why I say to the doctor, 'Doctor,' I say, 'perhaps we were the same ourselves when we were young and first loved each other.' "

Already I thought I saw vaguely what the dear soul had come to tell me, but I only said I supposed Martin was still with them.

She told me no, he had gone to King George's. That was his old school, and being prize-giving day the masters had asked him to the sports and to the dinner that was to be given that night before the breaking-up for the holidays.

"The boys will give him a cheer, I know they will," she said.

I said of course he would be back to-morrow, but again she said no; he had gone for good, and they had said good-bye to him. When he left King George's he was to go on to Castle Raa. Didn't I know that? He had said he would telegraph to me. But being from home perhaps I had not yet received his message. Oh yes, he was going on to the Castle to-morrow night and would stay there until it was time to leave the island.

"I'm so glad," I said, hardly knowing with what fervour I had said it, until I saw the same expression of fear come back to the sweet old face.

"Martin will be glad, too," she said, "and that's . . . that's why I've come to see you."

"That?"

"You won't be cross with me, will you? But Martin is so fond of you. . . . He always has been fond of you, ever since he was a boy . . . but this time . . . "

"Yes?"

"This time I thought . . . I really, really thought he was too fond of you."

I had to hold my breast to keep down the cry of joy that was rising to my throat, but the dear soul saw nothing.

"Not that he said so—not to say said so, but it's a mother to see things, isn't it? And he was talking and talking so much about Mary O'Neill that I was frightened—really frightened."

"Frightened?"

"He's so tender-hearted, you see. And then you . . . you're such a wonderful woman grown. Tommy the Mate says there hasn't been the like of you on this island since they laid your mother under the sod. It's truth enough, too—

gospel truth. And Martin—Martin says there isn't your equal, no, not in London itself neither. So . . . so," she said, trembling and stammering, "I was thinking . . . I was thinking he was only flesh and blood like the rest of us, poor boy, and if he got to be *too* fond of you . . . now that you're married and have a husband, you know. . . . "

The trembling and stammering stopped her for a moment.

"They're saying you are not very happy in your marriage neither. Times and times I've heard people saying he isn't kind to you, and they married you against your will. . . . So I was telling myself if that's so, and Martin and you came together now, and you encouraged him, and let him go on . . . and anything came of it . . . any trouble or disgrace or the like of that . . . it would be such a terrible cruel shocking thing for the boy . . . just when everybody's talking about him and speaking so well too."

It was out at last. Her poor broken-hearted story was told. Being a married woman, unhappily married, too, I was a danger to her beloved son, and she had come to me in her sweet, unmindful, motherly selfishness to ask me to protect him *against myself*.

"Whiles and whiles I've been thinking of it," she said. " 'What will I do?' I've been asking myself, and sometimes I've been thinking I would speak to Martin. I didn't dare do it, though. But when I heard last night that you had come home to see your father, I said: 'Doctor, I'll go over and speak to herself.' 'You'll never do that, Christian Ann,' said the doctor. 'Yes, I will,' I said. 'I'll speak to the young mistress herself. She may be a great lady now, but haven't I nursed her on my knee? She'll never do anything to harm my boy, if I ask her not to. No indeed she won't. Not Mary O'Neill. I'll never believe it of her. Never in this world.' "

The sweet old face was beaming but it was wet with tears, too, and while trying to get out her pocket-handkerchief, she was fumbling with the flowers which she was still holding and passing from hand to hand.

"Let me take the roses," I said as well as I could, for I could scarcely say anything.

"I brought them for you," she said, and then she laughed, a little confusedly, at her own forgetfulness.

"To be sure they're nothing to the green-house ones you'll have at the Castle, but I thought you'd like them for all that.

They're from the tree outside the window of your own little room. We call it your room still—the one you slept in when you came in your little velvet frock and pinnie, singing carols to my door. 'Mary O'Neill's room,' Martin called it then, and it's been the same to us ever since."

This touched me so deeply that, before I knew what I was doing, I was putting my arm about her waist and asking her to tell me what she wished me to do and I would do it.

"Will you, though?" she said, and then one by one she propounded the artless little schemes she had concocted to cure Martin of what she conceived to be his love for me.

Her first thought was that I might make excuse of my father's illness to remain where I was until the time came for Martin to leave the island; but she repented of this almost immediately, remembering that Martin was set on seeing me, ('I *must* see her,' he had said) and if he did not see me he would be so downhearted.

Then she thought I might praise up my husband to Martin, saying what a fine man he was to be sure, and how good he had been to me, and what a proud woman I was to be married to him; but she was ashamed of that almost as soon as she had said it, for it might not be true, and Martin might see I was pretending.

Finally, she suggested that in order to create a coolness between Martin and myself I might try not to be so nice to him, speaking short to him sometimes, and even harsh and angry; but no, that would be too cruel, especially from me, after all these years, just when he was going so far away, too, and only the Lord and the blessed saints knew what was to become of him.

It was Martin, Martin, always Martin. Still in her sweet motherly selfishness she could think of nobody else. Fondly as she loved me, it never occurred to her for a moment that if I did what she wished and sent Martin away from me, I too would suffer. But a harder heart than mine would have melted at the sight of her perplexity and distress, and when with a helpless look she said:

"I don't know what you are to do—I really, really don't," I comforted her (needing comfort so much myself), and told her I would find a way of my own to do what she desired.

"Will you, though?" she said.

"Indeed I will."

"And you won't send him away sore-hearted, either?"

"Indeed I won't."

"I knew you would say that. May the Lord and His holy Mother bless you!"

She was weeping tender, copious, blessed tears by this time, but there were smiles behind them.

"Not that there's another woman in the world I would rather give him to if things were as they used to be. But they're different now, are they not?" she asked.

"Yes, they're different now," I answered.

"But are you sure you're not cross with me for coming?"

"Oh, no, no," I said, and it was all I *could* say for my voice was failing me.

She gave a sigh of inexpressible relief and then rose to go.

"I must be going now. The doctor is digging in the garden and he hasn't had his breakfast. But I put the pot on the *slouree* to boil and it will be ready for the porridge."

She got as far as the door and then turned and said:

"I wish I had a photo of you—a right one, just as you are at this very minute. I'd hang it in your own room, and times and times in the day I'd be running upstairs to look at it. But it's all as one. I've got a photo of you here," (touching her breast) "and sometimes I can see it as plain as plain."

I could not speak after that, but I kissed her as she was going out, and she said:

"That's nice, now! Good-bye, *my chree!* You'll not be going home until to-morrow, it's like, so perhaps I'll be putting another sight on you. Good-bye!"

I went to the window to watch her as she walked down the drive. She was wiping her eyes, but her head was up and I thought her step was light, and I was sure her face was shining.

God bless her! The dear sweet woman! Such women as she is, and my mother was—so humble and loving, so guileless and pure, never saying an unkind word or thinking an unkind thought—are the flowers of the world that make the earth smell sweet.

When she was gone and I remembered the promise I had made to her I asked myself what was to become of me. If I could neither divorce my husband under any circumstances without breaking a sacrament of the Church, nor love Martin and be loved by him without breaking the heart of his mother, where was I?

I intended to go home the following morning; I was to meet Martin the following night. What was I to say? What was I to do?

All day long these questions haunted me and I could find no answers. But towards evening I took my troubles where I had often taken them—to Father Dan.

SIXTY-SECOND CHAPTER

The door of the Presbytery was opened by Father Dan's Irish housekeeper, a good old soul whose attitude to her master was that of a "moithered" mother to a wilful child.

All the way up the narrow staircase to his room, she grumbled about his reverence. Unless he was sickening for the scarlet fever she didn't know in her seven sinses what was a-matter with him these days. He was as white as a ghost, and as thin as a shadder, and no wonder neither, for he didn't eat enough to keep body and soul together.

Yesterday itself she had cooked him a chicken as good as I could get at the Big House; "done to a turn, too, with a nice bit of Irish bacon on top, and a bowl of praties biled in their jackets and a basin of beautiful new buttermilk;" but no, never a taste nor a sup did he take of it.

"It's just timpting Providence his reverence is, and it'll be glory to God if you'll tell him so."

"What's that you're saying about his reverence, Mrs. Cassidy?" cried Father Dan from the upper landing.

"I'm saying you're destroying yourself with your fasting and praying and your midnight calls at mountain cabins, and never a ha'porth of anything in your stomach to do it on."

"Whisht then, Mrs. Cassidy, it's tay-time, isn't it? So just step back to your kitchen and put on your kittle, and bring up two of your best china cups and saucers, and a nice piece of buttered toast, not forgetting a thimbleful of something neat, and then it's the mighty proud woman ye'll be entoirely to be waiting for once on the first lady in the island. . . . Come in, my daughter, come in."

He was laughing as he let loose his Irish tongue, but I could see that his housekeeper had not been wrong and that he looked worn and troubled.

As soon as he had taken me into his cosy study and put me to sit in the big chair before the peat and wood fire, I would have begun on my errand, but not a word would he hear until the tea had come up and I had taken a cup of it.

Then stirring the peats for light as well as warmth, (for the room was dark with its lining of books, and the evening was closing in) he said:

"Now what is it? Something serious—I can see that much."

"It *is* serious, Father Dan."

"Tell me then," he said, and as well as I could I told him my story.

I told him that since I had seen him last, during that violent scene at Castle Raa, my relations with my husband had become still more painful; I told him that, seeing I could not endure any longer the degradation of the life I was living, I had thought about divorce; I told him that going first to the Bishop and afterwards to my father's advocate I had learned that neither the Church nor the law, for their different reasons, could grant me the relief I required; and finally, in a faint voice (almost afraid to hear myself speak it), I told him my solemn and sacred secret—that whatever happened I could not continue to live where I was now living because I loved somebody else than my husband.

While I was speaking Father Dan was shuffling his feet and plucking at his shabby cassock, and as soon as I had finished he flashed out on me with an anger I had never seen in his face or heard in his voice before.

"I know who it is," he said. "It's Martin Conrad."

I was so startled by this that I was beginning to ask how he knew, when he cried:

"Never mind how I know. Perhaps you think an old priest has no eyes for anything but his breviary, eh? It's young Martin, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"The wretch, the rascal, the scoundrel! If he ever dares to come to this house again, I'll slam the door in his face."

I knew he loved Martin almost as much as I did, so I paid no heed to the names he was calling him, but I tried to say that I alone had been to blame, and that Martin had done nothing.

"Don't tell me he has done nothing," cried Father Dan. "I know what he has done. He has told you he loves you, hasn't he?"

"No."

"He has been colloguing with you, then, and getting you to say things?"

"Never."

"Pitying and sympathising with you, anyway, in your relations with your husband?"

"Not for one moment."

"He had better not! Big man as he is in England now, I'll warm his jacket for him if he comes here making mischief with a child of mine. But thank the Lord and the holy saints he's going away soon, so you'll see no more of him."

"But he is coming to Castle Raa," I said, "and I am to see him to-morrow night."

"That too! The young scoundrel!"

I explained that my husband had invited him, being prompted to do so by the other woman.

"Worse and worse!" cried Father Dan. "Don't you see that they're laying a trap for you, and like two young fools you're walking directly into it. But no matter! You mustn't go."

I told him that I should be compelled to do so, for Martin was coming on my account only, and I could neither tell him the truth nor make an excuse that would not be a falsehood.

"Well, well, perhaps you're right there. It's not the best way to meet temptation to be always running away from it. That's Irish, but it's true enough, though. You must conquer this temptation, my child; you must fight it and overcome it."

"But I've tried and tried and I cannot," I said.

And then I told him the story of my struggle—how love had been no happiness to me but only a cruel warfare, how I had suffered and prayed and gone to mass and confession, yet all to no purpose, for my affection for Martin was like a blazing fire which nothing could put out.

Father Dan's hands and lips were trembling while I spoke and I could see that he was shuddering with pity for me, so I went on to say that if God had put this pure and holy love into my heart could it be wrong—

"Stop a minute," cried Father Dan. "Who says God put it there? And who informed you it was pure and holy? Let us see where we are. Come, now. You say the Bishop told you that you could never be divorced under any circumstances?"

"Yes."

"Yet you wish to leave your husband?"

"How can I help it? The life I have been living is too horrible."

"Never mind that now. You wish to leave your husband, don't you?"

"I . . . I must."

"And you want to go to this . . . this young . . . in short, you want to go to Martin Conrad? That's the plain truth, isn't it? Don't deny it. . . . Very well, let us call things by their proper names. What is the fact? You are asking me—me, your spiritual Father—to allow you to live a life of open adultery. That's what it comes to. You know it is, and God and His holy Mother have mercy on your soul!"

I was so startled and shocked by his fierce assault, and by the cruel climax it had come to, that I flung up my hands to my face and kept them there, for I felt as if my brain had been stunned and my heart was bursting.

How long I sat like this, with my hidden face to the fire, I do not know; but after a long silence in which I heard nothing but my own heaving breath, I became aware that Father Dan had drawn one of my hands down to his knee and was smoothing it with his own.

"Don't be angry with your old priest for telling you the truth," he said. "It's hard to bear; I know it's hard; but it's as hard for him as for you, my child. Think—only think what he is trying to save you from. If you do what you wish to do, you will put yourself out of communion. If you put yourself out of communion, you will cease to be a Catholic. What will become of you then, my daughter? What will be left to replace the consolations of the Church—in sorrow, in suffering, in the hour of death? Have you never thought of that?"

I never had. It was thrilling through and through me.

"You say you cannot live any longer with your husband because he has broken the vow he made to you at your marriage. But think how many many thousands of poor women all the world over are doing it every day—living with adulterous husbands for the sake of their homes and children. And not for the sake of their homes and children only, but for the sake of their souls and their religion. Blessed, blessed martyrs, though we know nothing about them, holding society and the Church and the human family together."

I was trembling all over. I felt as if Father Dan were trying to take away from me the only sweet and precious thing in my life that was left.

"Then you think you cannot live without the one you love, because all your heart is full of him. But think of the holy women, the holy saints, who have gone through the same temptation—fighting against it with all the strength of their souls until the very wounds of our blessed Lord have been marked on their bodies."

He was creeping closer to my side. His voice was quivering at my ear. I was struggling hard, and still trembling all over.

"Hold fast by the Church, my child. It is your only refuge. Remember that God made your marriage and you cannot break it without forsaking your faith. Can anything be good that is bought at such a price? Nothing in this world! When you meet to-morrow night—you two children—tell him that. Tell him I told you to say so. . . . I love you both. Don't break your old priest's heart. He's in trouble enough for you already. Don't let him think that he must lose you altogether. And then remember your mother, too—that saint in heaven who suffered so long and was patient. . . . Everything will depend upon you, my child. In matters of this kind the woman is the stronger vessel. Be strong for him also. Renounce your guilty love, my daughter—"

"But I cannot, I cannot," I said. "I love him, and I cannot give him up!"

"Let us ask God to help you," said Father Dan, and still holding my hand he drew me down to my knees and knelt beside me. The room was dark by this time, and only the sullen glow from the peat fire was on our faces.

Then in a low voice, so low that it was like his throbbing whisper before the altar, when he raised the Sacred Host, Father Dan prayed for me (calling me his dear child whom God had committed to his care) that I might keep my marriage vow and be saved from the temptation to break it.

His beautiful prayer or his throbbing voice, or both together, had a great effect upon me, and when I rose to my feet, I felt stronger. Although Martin was as dear to me as ever, I thought I saw my way at last. If he loved me as I loved him, I had to be brave for both of us. I had to oppose to the carnal instinct of love the spiritual impulse of renunciation. Yes, yes, that was what I had to do.

Father Dan saw me to the door.

"Give my love to my boy," he said, "and don't forget what I told you to tell him."

"I'll tell him," I replied, for though I knew my heart was bleeding I felt calm and more courageous.

It was milking time and the cows were lowing in the byre when I crossed the fields and the farm-yard on my way back to my father's house.

Early next morning I left it for Castle Raa.

SIXTY-THIRD CHAPTER

Although it was mid-day before I reached the Castle, the gate to the park had not been opened, the drive was deserted and even the great door to the house itself was closed.

And when, in answer to my ringing, one of the maids came after a certain delay, wearing neither apron nor cap, I found the hall empty and no sign of life in the house, except a shrill chorus of laughter which came from the servants' quarters.

"What's the meaning of this?" I asked, but before the girl could reply, Price who had come down to take my wraps said:

"I'll tell your ladyship presently."

As we were going upstairs she told me that the entire house-party had that morning gone off on a cruise in Mr. Eastcliff's yacht, that they would be away several days, and that Madame had left a letter for me which was supposed to explain everything.

I found it on the mantelpiece in my boudoir under an open telegram which had been stuck into the edge of the bevelled glass. The telegram, which was addressed to me, was from Martin.

"Expect to arrive to-morrow evening. Staying until Wednesday afternoon. If not convenient wire Principal's House, King George's College."

"To-morrow?"

"That means to-day," said Price. "The telegram came yesterday. Madame opened it and she told me to say——"

"Let me read her letter first," I said.

The letter ran as follows:

"My Dearest Mary,

"You will be astonished to find the house empty and all your racketty guests gone. Let me explain, and if you are

angry about what has happened you must lay all the blame on me.

"Well, you see, my dear, it was arranged nearly a month ago that before we left your delightful house we should make a little cruise round your charming island. But we had not expected that this would come off so soon, when suddenly and unexpectedly that silly Mr. Eastcliff, who has no more brains than a spring chicken, remembered that he had promised to visit a friend who has taken a shoot in Skye. Result—we had to make the cruise immediately or not at all, and yet behold! our hostess was away on an urgent call of sickness, and what in the world were we to do without her?

"Everybody was in a quandary—that wise Mr. Vivian saying it would be 'jolly bad form by Jove' to go without you, while Mr. Eastcliffs 'deelightfully vicked' little Camilla declared it would be 'vilaynous,' and your husband vowed that his Margaret Mary could not possibly be left behind.

"It was then that a certain friend of yours took the liberty of remembering that you did not like the sea, and that even if you had been here and had consented to go with us it would have been only out of the sweetness of your heart, which I've always known to be the tenderest and most unselfish in the world.

"This seemed to satisfy the whole house and everybody was at ease, when lo! down on us like a thunderbolt came the telegram from Mr. Conrad. Thinking it might require to be repeated, I took the liberty of opening it, and then we were in a plight, I assure you.

"What on earth was he to think of our leaving the house when he was on the point of arriving? And, above all, how were we to support the disappointment of missing him—some of us, the women especially, and myself in particular, being just crazy to see him again?

"This nearly broke down our plans altogether, but once more I came to the rescue by remembering that Mr. Conrad was not coming to see us but you, and that the very kindest thing we could do for a serious person of his kind would be to take our racketty presence out of the way.

"That contented everybody except my mother, who—would you believe it?—had gotten some prudish notions into her head about the impropriety of leaving you alone, and declared her intention of staying behind to keep you in countenance! We soon laughed her out of that, though, and now, to

relieve you of her company, we are carrying her away with us—which will be lots of fun, for she's as fond of water as a cat and will fancy she is seasick all the time.

"*Good-bye, dearest! We're just off. I envy you. You happy, happy girl! I am sure you will have such a good time. What a man! As natural as nature! I see by the insular paper that your islanders adore him.*

"*Hope you found your father better. Another wonderful man! Such an original type, too! Good-bye, my dearest dear,*
ALMA.

"P.S. *Have missed you so much, darling! Castle Raa wasn't the same place without you—I assure you it wasn't.*"

While I was turning this letter over in my hand, wondering what the beautiful fiend had meant by it, my maid, who was standing by, was visibly burning with a desire to know its contents and give me the benefit of her own interpretation.

I told her in general what Alma had said and she burst into little screams of indignation.

"Well, the huzzy! The wicked huzzy! That's all she is, my lady, begging your pardon, and there's no other name for her. Arranged a month ago, indeed! It was never thought of until last night after Mr. Conrad's telegram came."

"Then what does it mean?"

"I can tell your ladyship what it means, if you'll promise not to fly out at me again. It means that Madame wants to stand in your shoes, and wouldn't mind going through the divorce court to do so. And seeing that you can't be tempted to divorce your husband because you are a Catholic, she thinks your husband, who isn't, might be tempted to divorce you. So she's setting a trap for you, and she expects you to fall into it while she's away, and if you do . . ."

"Impossible!"

"Oh, trust *me*, your ladyship. I haven't been keeping my ears closed while your ladyship has been away, and if that chatterbox of a maid of hers hadn't been such a fool I suppose she would have been left behind to watch. But there's somebody else in the house who thinks she has a grievance against you, and if listening at keyholes will do anything . . . Hush!"

Price stopped suddenly with her finger to her lip, and then going on tiptoe to the door she opened it with a jerk, when the little housekeeper was to be seen rising to an upright position while pretending that she had slipped.

"I only came to ask if her ladyship had lunched?" she said.

I answered that I had not, and then told her (so as to give her no further excuse for hanging about me) that in future she was to take her orders from Price—an announcement which caused my maid to stand several inches taller in her shoes, and sent the housekeeper hopping downstairs with her beak in the air like an injured cockatoo.

All the afternoon I was in a state of the utmost agitation, sometimes wondering what Martin would think of the bad manners of my husband, who after inviting him had gone away just as he was about to arrive; sometimes asking myself, with a quiver of shame, if he would imagine that this was a scheme of my own contriving; but oftenest remembering my resolution of renunciation and thinking of the much fiercer fight that was before me now that I had to receive and part with him alone.

More than once I had half a mind to telegraph to Martin putting him off, and though I told myself that to do so would not be renunciation but merely flight from temptation, I always knew at the bottom of my heart that I really wanted him to come.

Nevertheless I vowed to my very soul that I should be strong—strong in every word and look—and if Alma was daring me I should defy her, and she would see that I should neither yield nor run away.

Thus I entrenched myself at last in a sort of bright strong faith in my power to resist temptation. But I must leave it to those who know better than I the way to read a woman's heart to say how it came to pass that towards five o'clock, when I heard the sound of wheels and going on to my balcony saw a jaunting-car at the front entrance, and then opening my door heard Martin's great voice in the hall, I flew downstairs—literally flew—in my eagerness to welcome him.

There he was in his brown Harris tweeds and soft slouch hat with such an atmosphere of health and sweep of winds about him as almost took away my breath.

"Helloa!" he cried, and I am sure his eyes brightened at the sight of me for they were like the sea when the sun shines on it.

"You're better, aren't you?" he said. "No need to ask that, though—the colour in your face is wonderful."

In spite of my resolution, and the attempt I made to show him only a kind of glad seriousness, I could not help it if I blushed. Also I could not help it if, while going upstairs and telling him what had happened to the house-party, I said he was doomed to the disappointment of having nobody except myself for company, and then, woman-like, waited eagerly for what he would say.

"So they're all gone except yourself, are they?" he said.

"I'm afraid they are," I answered.

"Well, if it had been the other way about, and you had gone and they had stayed, by the stars of God, I *should* have been disappointed. But things being as they are, we'll muddle through, shan't we?"

Not all the vows in the world could prevent me from finding that answer delightful, and when, on entering my boudoir, he said:

"Sorry to miss Madame though. I wanted a word with that lady before I went down to the Antarctic," I could not resist the mischievous impulse to show him Alma's letter.

While he read it his bright face darkened (for all the world like a jeweller's window when the shutter comes down on it), and when he had finished it he said once more:

"I hate that woman! She's like a snake. I'd like to put my foot on it."

And then—

"She may run away as much as she likes, but I *will* yet, you go bail, I will."

He was covered with dust and wanted to wash, so I rang for a maid, who told me that Mr. and Mrs. Eastcliff's rooms had been prepared for Mr. Conrad. This announcement (though I tried to seem unmoved) overwhelmed me with confusion, seeing that the rooms in question almost communicated with my own. But Martin only laughed and said:

"Stunning! We'll live in this wing of the house and leave the rest of the old barracks to the cats, should we?"

I was tingling with joy, but all the same I knew that a grim battle was before me.

SIXTY-FOURTH CHAPTER

By the time he returned from his room I had tea served in my boudoir, and while we sat facing the open door to the balcony he told me about his visit to his old school; how at the dinner on the previous night the Principal had proposed his health, and after the lads had sung "Forty Years On" he had told them yarns about his late expedition until they made the long hiss of indrawn breath which is peculiar to boys when they are excited; how they had followed him to his bedroom as if he had been the Pied Piper of Hamelin and questioned him and clambered over him until driven off by the house-master; and how, finally, before he was out of bed this morning the smallest scholar in the junior house, a tiny little cherub with the face of his mother, had come knocking at his door to ask if he wanted a cabin boy.

Martin laughed as if he had been a boy himself (which he always was and always will be) while telling me these stories, and I laughed too, though with a certain tremor, for I was constantly remembering my resolution and feeling afraid to be too happy.

After tea we went out on to the balcony, and leaned side by side over the crumbling stone balustrade to look at the lovely landscape—loveliest when the sun is setting on it—with the flower-garden below and the headland beyond, covered with heather and gorse and with a winding white path lying over it like the lash of a whip until it dipped down to the sea.

"It's a beautiful old world, though, isn't it?" said Martin.

"Isn't it?" I answered, and we looked into each other's eyes and smiled.

Then we heard the light *shsh* of a garden hose, and looking down saw an old man watering the geraniums.

"Sakes alive! It's Tommy the Mate," cried Martin, and leaving me on the balcony he went leaping down the stone stairway to greet his old comrade.

"God bless me!" said Tommy. "Let me have a right look at ye. Yes, yes, it's himself, for sure."

A little gale of tender memories floated up to me from my childhood at seeing those two together again, with Martin now standing head and shoulders above the old man's Glengarry cap.

"You've been over the highways of the sea, farther than Franklin himself, they're telling me," said Tommy, and when Martin, laughing merrily, admitted that he had been farther south at all events, the old sailor said:

"Well, well! Think of that now! But wasn't I always telling the omadhauns what you'd be doing some day?"

Then with a "glime" of his "starboard eye" in my direction he said:

"You haven't got a woman yet though? . . . No, I thought not. You're like myself, boy—there's not many of them sorts *in* for you."

After that, and a more undisguised look my way, the old man talked about me, still calling me the "lil misthress" and saying they were putting a power of gold on my fingers, but he would be burning candles to the miracles of God to see the colour of it in my cheeks too.

"She's a plant that doesn't take kindly to a hot-house same as this," (indicating the house) "and she'll not be thriving until somebody's bedding her out, I'm thinking."

It was Saturday, and after dinner Martin proposed that we should walk to the head of the cliff to see Blackwater by night, which was a wonderful spectacle, people said, at the height of the season, so I put a silk wrap over my head and we set out together.

There was no moon and few stars were visible, but it was one of those luminous nights in summer which never forget the day. Therefore we walked without difficulty along the white winding path with its nutty odour of the heather and gorse until we came near the edge of the cliff, and then suddenly the town burst upon our view, with its promenades, theatres, and dancing palaces ablaze with electric light, which was reflected with almost equal brilliance in the smooth water of the bay.

We were five miles from Blackwater, but listening hard we thought we could hear, through the boom of the sea on the dark cliffs below us, the thin sounds of the bands that were playing in the open-air pavilions, and looking steadfastly we thought we could see, in the black patches under the white light, the movement of the thousands of persons who were promenading along "the front."

This led Martin to talk of my father, saying as we walked back, with the dark outlines of the sleeping mountains confronting us, what a marvellous man he had been to transform in twenty years the little fishing and trading port into a great resort for hundreds of thousands of pleasure-seekers.

"But is he any better or happier for the wealth it has brought him, and for the connections he has bought with it? Is anybody any better?" said Martin.

"I know one who isn't," I answered.

I had not meant to say that. It had slipped out unawares, and in my confusion at the self-revelation which it seemed to make, I tripped in the darkness and would have fallen if Martin had not caught me up.

In doing this he had to put his arms about me and to hold me until I was steady on my feet, and having done so he took my hand and drew it through his arm and in this way we walked the rest of the way back.

It would be impossible and perhaps foolish to say what that incident meant to me. I felt a thrill of joy, a quivering flood of delight which, with all the raptures of my spiritual love, had never come to me before.

Every woman who loves her husband must know what it is, but to me it was a great revelation. It was just as if some new passion had sprung into life in me at a single moment. And it had—the mighty passion that lies at the root of our being, the overwhelming instinct of sex which, taking no account of religion and resolutions, sweeps everything before it like a flood.

I think Martin must have felt it too, for all at once he ceased to speak, and I was trembling so much with this new feeling of tenderness that I could not utter a word. So I heard nothing as we walked on but the crackle of our footsteps on the gravel path and the measured boom of the sea which we were leaving behind us—nothing but that and the quick beating in my own breast.

When we came to the garden the frowning face of the old house was in front of us, and it was all in darkness, save for the light in my room which came out on to the balcony. Everything was quiet. The air was breathless. There was not a rustle in the trees.

We took two or three turns on the lawn in front of my windows, saying nothing but feeling terribly, fearfully happy. After a few moments (or they seemed few) a cuckoo clock on my desk struck eleven, and we went up the stone stairway into my boudoir and parted for the night.

Even then we did not speak, but Martin took my hand and lifted my fingers to his lips, and the quivering delight I had been feeling ever since I slipped on the headland rushed through me again.

At the next moment I was in my room. I did not turn on the light. I undressed in the darkness and when my maid came I was in bed. She wanted to tell me about a scene with the housekeeper in the kitchen, but I said:

"I don't want to talk to-night, Price."

I did not know what was happening to me. I only knew, for the first time that night, that above everything else I was a woman, and that my renunciation, if it was ever to come to pass, would be a still more tragic thing than I had expected.

My grim battle had begun.

SIXTY-FIFTH CHAPTER

When I awoke in the morning I took myself severely to task. Was this how I was fulfilling the promise I had made to Martin's mother, or preparing to carry out the counsel of Father Dan?

"I must be more careful," I told myself. "I must keep a stronger hold of myself."

The church bells began to ring, and I determined to go to mass. I wanted to go alone and much as I grudged every minute of Martin's company which I lost, I was almost glad when, on going into the boudoir with my missal in my hand, I found him at a table covered with papers and heard him say:

"Helloa! See these letters and telegrams? Sunday as it is I've got to answer them."

Our church was a little chapel-of-ease on the edge of my husband's estate, opened, after centuries of neglect, by the bad Lord Raa, in his regenerate days, for the benefit of the people of his own village. It was very sweet to see their homely faces as they reverently bowed and rose, and even to hear their creachy voices when they joined in the singing of the Gloria.

Following the gospel there was a sermon on the words "Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil." The preacher was a young curate, the brother of my husband's coachman; and it occurred to me that he could know very little of temptation for himself, but the instruction he gave us was according to the doctrine of our Church, as I had received it from the Reverend Mother and the Cardinals who used to hold retreats at the convent.

"Beware of the temptations of the flesh, my children," said the priest. "The Evil One is very subtle, and not only in our moments of pride and prosperity, but also in our hours of sorrow and affliction, he is for ever waiting and watching to betray us to our downfall and damnation."

In the rustling that followed the sermon a poor woman who sat next to me, with a print handkerchief over her head, whispered in my ear that she was sorry she had not brought her husband, for he had given way to drink; poor fellow, since the island had had such good times and wages had been so high.

But the message came closer home to me. Remembering the emotions of the night before, I prayed fervently to be strengthened against all temptation and preserved from all sin. And when the mass was resumed I recalled some of the good words with which I had been taught to assist at the Holy Sacrifice—praying at the *Credo* that as I had become a child in the bosom of the Church I might live and die in it.

When the service was over I felt more at ease and I emptied my purse, I remember, partly into the plate and partly to the poor people at the church door.

It was in this spirit that I returned home in the broad sunshine of noonday. But half way up the drive I met Martin walking briskly down to meet me. He was bareheaded and in flannels; and I could not help it if he looked to me so good, so strong, and so well able to protect a woman against every danger, that the instructions I had received in church, and the resolutions I had formed there, seemed to run out of my heart as rapidly as the dry sand of the sea-shore runs through one's fingers.

"Helloa!" he cried, as usual. "The way I've been wasting this wonderful morning over letters and telegrams! But not another minute will I give to anything under the stars of God but you."

If there was any woman in the world who could have resisted that greeting I was not she, and though I was a little confused I was very happy.

As we walked back to the house we talked of my father and his sudden illness, then of his mother and my glimpse of her, and finally of indifferent things, such as the weather, which had been a long drought and might end in a deluge.

By a sort of mutual consent we never once spoke of the central subject of our thoughts—my marriage and its fatal consequences—but I noticed that Martin's voice was soft and caressing, that he was walking close to my side, and that as often as I looked up at him he was looking down at me and smiling.

It was the same after luncheon when we went out into the garden and sat on a seat in the shrubbery almost immediately facing my windows, and he spread a chart on a rustic table and pointing to a red line on it said:

"Look, this is the course of our new cruise, please God."

He talked for a long time, about his captain and crew; the scientific experts who had volunteered to accompany him; his aeronautic outfit, his sledges and his skis; but whatever he talked about—if it was only his dogs and the food he had found for them—it was always in that soft, caressing voice which made me feel as if (though he never said one word of love) he were making love to me, and saying the sweetest things a man could say to a woman.

After a time I found myself answering in the same tones, and even when speaking on the most matter-of-fact subjects I felt as if I were saying the sweetest things a woman could say to a man.

We sat a long time so, and every moment we were together seemed to make our relation more perilous, until at length the sweet seductive twilight of the shortening autumn day began to frighten me, and making excuse of a headache I said I must go indoors.

He walked with me up the stone-stairway and into my boudoir, until we got to the very door of my room, and then suddenly he took up both my hands and kissed them passionately.

I felt the colour rushing to my cheeks and I had an almost irresistible impulse to do something in return. But conquering it with a great effort, I turned quickly into my bedroom, shut the door, pulled down the blinds and then sat and covered my face and asked myself, with many bitter pangs, if it could possibly be true (as I had been taught to believe) that our nature was evil and our senses were always tempting us to our destruction.

Several hours passed while I sat in the darkness with this warfare going on between my love and my religion, and then Price came to dress me for dinner, and she was full of cheerful gossip.

"Men are *such* children," she said; "they can't help giving themselves away, can they?"

It turned out that after I had left the lawn she had had some conversation with Martin, and I could see that she was eager to tell me what he had said about myself.

"The talk began about your health and altered looks, my lady. 'Don't you think your mistress is looking ill?' said he. 'A little,' I said. 'But her body is not so ill as her heart, if you ask me,' said I."

"You never said that, Price?"

"Well, I could not help saying it if I thought so, could I?"

"And what did he say?"

"He didn't say anything then, my lady, but when I said, 'You see, sir, my lady is tied to a husband she doesn't love,' he said, 'How can she, poor thing?' 'Worse than that,' I said, 'her husband loves another woman.' 'The fool! Where does he keep his eyes?' said he. 'Worse still,' said I, 'he flaunts his infidelities in her very face.' 'The brute!' he said, and his face looked so fierce that you would have thought he wanted to take his lordship by the throat and choke him. 'Why doesn't she leave the man?' said he. 'That's what *I* say, sir, but I think it's her religion,' I said. 'Then God help her, for there's no remedy for that,' said he. And then seeing him so down I said, 'But we women are always ruled by our hearts in the long run.' 'Do you think so?' said he. 'I'm sure of it,' said I, 'only we must have somebody to help us,' I said. 'There's her father,' said he. 'A father is of no use in a case like this,' I said, 'especially such a one as my lady's is, according to all reports. No,' said I, 'it must be somebody else—somebody who cares enough for a woman to risk everything for her, and just take her and *make* her do what's best for herself whether she likes it or not. Now if somebody like that were to come to my lady, and get her out of her trouble,' I said. . . . 'Somebody will,' said he. 'Make your mind easy about that. Somebody will,' he said, and then he went on walking to and fro."

Price told this story as if she thought she was bringing me the gladdest of glad tidings; but the idea that Martin had come back into my life to master me, to take possession of me, to claim me as his own (just as he did when I was a child) and thereby compel me to do what I had promised his mother and Father Dan not to do—this was terrifying.

But there was a secret joy in it too, and every woman will know what I mean if I say that my heart was beating high with the fierce delight of belonging to somebody when I returned to the boudoir where Martin was waiting to sit down to dinner.

Then came a great surprise.

Martin was standing with his back to the fire-place, and I saw in a moment that the few hours which had intervened had changed him as much as they had changed me.

"Helloa! Better, aren't we?" he cried, but he was now cold, almost distant, and even his hearty voice seemed to have sunk to a kind of nervous treble.

I could not at first understand this, but after a while I began to see that we two had reached the point beyond which it was impossible to go without encountering the most tremendous fact of our lives—my marriage and all that was involved by it.

During dinner we spoke very little. He seemed intentionally not to look at me. The warm glances of his sea-blue eyes, which all the afternoon had been making the colour mount to my cheeks, had gone, and it sent a cold chill to my heart to look across the table at his clouded face. But sometimes when he thought my own face was down I was conscious that his eyes were fixed on me with a questioning, almost an imploring gaze. His nervousness communicated itself to me. It was almost as if we had begun to be afraid of each other and were hovering on the brink of fatal revelations.

When dinner was over, the table cleared and the servants gone, I could bear the strain no longer, so making excuse of a letter I had to write to the Reverend Mother I sat down at my desk, whereupon Martin lit a cigar and said he would stroll over the headland.

I heard his footsteps going down the stone stairway from the balcony; I heard their soft thud on the grass of the lawn; I heard their sharper crackle on the gravel of the white path, and then they mingled with the surge and wash of the flowing tide and died away in the distance.

I rose from the desk, and going over to the balcony door looked out into the darkness. It was a beautiful, pathetic, heart-breaking night. No moon, but a perfect canopy of stars in a deep blue sky. The fragrance of unseen flowers—sweet-briar and rose as well as ripening fruit—came up from the garden. There was no wind either, not even the rustle of a leaf, and the last bird of evening was silent. All the great orchestra of nature was still, save for the light churning of the water running in the glen and the deep organ song of the everlasting sea.

"What can I do?" I asked myself.

Now that Martin was gone I had begun to understand him. His silence had betrayed his heart to me even more than his speech could have done. Towering above him like a frowning mountain was the fact that I was a married woman and he was trying to stand erect in his honour as a man.

"He must be suffering too," I told myself.

That was a new thought to me and it cut me to the quick.

When it came to me first I wanted to run after him and throw myself into his arms, and then I wanted to run away from him altogether.

I felt as if I were on the brink of two madnesses—the madness of breaking my marriage vows and the madness of breaking the heart of the man who loved me.

"Oh, what can I do?" I asked myself again.

I wanted him to go; I wanted him to stay; I did not know what I wanted. At length I remembered that in ordinary course he would be going in two days more, and I said to myself:

"Surely I can hold out that long."

But when I put this thought to my breast, thinking it would comfort me, I found that it burnt like hot iron.

Only two days, and then he would be gone, lost to me perhaps for ever. Did my renunciation require that? It was terrible!

There was a piano in the room, and to strengthen and console myself in my trouble I sat down to it and played and sang. I sang "Ave Maris Stella."

I was singing to myself, so I know I began softly—so softly that my voice must have been a whisper scarcely audible outside the room—

"Hail thou star of ocean,
Portal of the sky."

But my heart was full and when I came to the verses which always moved me most—

"Virgin of all virgins,
To thy shelter take us"—

my voice, without my knowing it, may have swelled out into the breathless night until it reached Martin, where he walked on the dark headland, and sounded to him like a cry that called him back.

I cannot say. I only know that when with a thickening throat I had come to an end, and my forehead had fallen on to the key-board, and there was no other sound in the air but the far-off surging of the sea, I heard somebody calling me in a soft and tremulous whisper,

"Mary!"

It was he. I went out to the balcony and there he was on the lawn below. The light of the room was on him and never before had I seen his strong face so full of agitation.

"Come down," he said. "I have something to say to you."

I could not resist him. He was my master. I had to obey.

When I reached the bottom of the stairway he took my hand, and I did not know whether it was his hand or mine that was trembling. He led me across the lawn to the seat in the shrubbery that almost faced my windows. In the soft and soundless night I could hear his footsteps on the turf and the rustle of my dress over the grass.

We sat, and for a moment he did not speak. Then with a passionate rush of words he said:

"Mary, I hadn't meant to say what I'm going to say now, but I can't do anything else. You are in trouble, and I can't stand by and see you so ill-used. I can't and I won't!"

I tried to answer him, but my throat was fluttering and I could not speak.

"It's only a few days before I ought to sail, but they may be enough in which to do something, and if they're not I'll postpone the expedition or put it off, or send somebody in my place, for go away I cannot and leave you like this."

I tried to say that he should not do that whatever happened to me, but still I could not speak.

"Mary, I want to help you. But I can only do so if you give me the *right* to do it. Nobody must tell me I'm a meddler, butting in where I have no business. There are people enough about you who would be only too ready to do that—people related to you by blood and by law."

I knew what he was coming to, for his voice was quivering in my ears like the string of a bow.

"There is only one sort of right, Mary, that is above the right of blood, and you know what that is."

My eyes were growing so dim that I could hardly see the face which was so close to mine.

"Mary," he said, "I have always cared for you. Surely you know that. By the saints of God I swear there has never been any other girl for me, and now there never will be. Perhaps I ought to have told you this before, and I wanted to do so when I met you in Rome. But it didn't seem fair, and I couldn't bring myself to do it."

His passionate voice was breaking; I thought my heart was breaking also.

"All I could do I did, but it came to nothing; and now you are here and you are unhappy, and though it is so late I want to help you, to rescue you, to drag you out of this horrible situation before I go away. Let me do it. Give me the right of one you care enough for to allow him to speak on your behalf."

I knew what that meant. I knew that I was tottering on the very edge of a precipice, and to save myself I tried to think of Father Dan, of Martin's mother, of my own mother, and since I could not speak I struggled to pray.

"Don't say you can't. If you do I shall go away a sorrowful man. I shall go at once too—to-night or to-morrow morning at latest, for my heart bleeds to look at you and I can't stay here any longer to see you suffer. It is not torture to me—it's hell!"

And then the irrepressible, overwhelming, inevitable moment came. Martin laid hold of my right hand and said in his tremulous voice:

"Mary . . . Mary . . . I . . . . I love you!"

I could hear no more. I could not think or pray or resist any longer. The bitter struggle was at an end. Before I knew what I was doing I was dropping my head on to his breast and he with a cry of joy was gathering me in his arms.

I was his. He had taken his own. Nothing counted in the presence of our love. To be only we two together—that was everything. The world and the world's laws, the Church and the Canons of the Church were blotted out, forgotten, lost.

For some moments I hardly breathed. I was only conscious that over my head Martin was saying something that seemed to come to me with all the deep and wonderful whispers of his heart.

"Then it's true! It's true that you love me! Yes, it's true! It's true! No one shall hurt you again. Never again! No, by the Lord God!"

And then suddenly—as suddenly as the moment of intoxication had come to me—I awoke from my delirium. Some little thing awakened me. I hardly know what it was. Perhaps it was only the striking of the cuckoo clock in my room.

"What are we doing?" I said.

Everything had rolled back on me—my marriage, Father Dan's warning, my promise to Martin's mother.

"Where are we?" I said.

"Hush! Don't speak," said Martin. "Let us think of nothing to-night—nothing except our love."

"Don't say that," I answered. "We are not free to love each other," and then, trying to liberate myself from his encircling arms I cried:

"God help me! God forgive me!"

"Wait!" said Martin, holding me a moment longer. "I know what you feel, and I'm not the man to want a girl to wrong her conscience. But there's one question I must ask you. If you *were* free, could you love me then?"

"Don't ask me that. I must not answer it."

"You must and shall," said Martin. "Could you?"

"Yes."

"That's enough for me—enough for to-night anyway. Have no fear. All shall be well. Go to your room now."

He raised me to my feet and led me back to the foot of the balcony, and there he kissed my hand and let me go.

"Good night!" he said softly.

"Good night!" I answered.

"God bless you, my pure sweet girl!"

At the next moment I was in my room, lying face down on my bed—seeing no hope on any side, and sobbing my heart out for what might have been but for the hard law of my religion and the cruel tangle of my fate.

SIXTY-SIXTH CHAPTER

NEXT morning, Monday morning, while I was breakfasting in my bedroom, Price came with a message from Martin to say that he was going into the glen and wished to know if I would go with him.

I knew perfectly what that meant. He wished to tell me what steps he intended to take towards my divorce, and my heart trembled with the thought of the answer I had to give him—that divorce for me, under any circumstances, was quite impossible.

Sorry as I was for myself I was still more sorry for Martin.

I felt like a judge who had to pronounce sentence upon him—dooming his dearest hopes to painful and instant death.

I could hear him on the lawn with Tommy the Mate, laughing like a boy let loose from school, and when I went down to him he greeted me with a cry of joy that was almost heart-breaking.

Our way to the glen was through a field of grass, where the dew was thick, and, my boots being thin, Martin in his high spirits wished to carry me across, and it was only with an effort that I prevented him from doing so.

The glen itself when we reached it (it was called Glen Raa) was almost cruelly beautiful that day, and remembering what I had to do in it I thought I should never be able to get it out of my sight—with its slumberous gloom like that of a vast cathedral, its thick arch of overhanging boughs through which the morning sunlight was streaming slantwards like the light through the windows of a clerestory, its running water below, its rustling leaves above, and the chirping of its birds on every side, making a sound that was like the chanting of a choir in some far-off apse and the rumbling of their voices in the roof.

Two or three times, as we walked down the glen towards a port (Port Raa) which lay at the seaward end of it, Martin rallied me on the settled gravity of my face and then I had to smile, though how I did so I do not know, for every other minute my heart was in my mouth, and never more so than when, to make me laugh, he rattled away in the language of his boyhood, saying:

"Isn't this stunning? Splendiferous, eh?"

When we came out at the mouth of the port, where a line of little stunted oaks leaned landward as with the memory of many a winter's storm, Martin said:

"Let us sit down here."

We sat on the sloping bank, with the insects ticking in the grass, the bees humming in the air, the sea fowl screaming in the sky, the broad sea in front, and the little bay below, where the tide, which was going out, had left behind it a sharp reef of black rocks covered with sea-weed.

A pleasure-steamer passed at that moment with its flags flying, its awnings spread, its decks crowded with excursionists, and a brass band playing one of Sousa's marches, and as soon as it had gone, Martin said:

"I've been thinking about our affair, Mary, how to go to work and all that, and of course the first thing we've got to do is to get a divorce.''

I made no answer, and I tried not to look at him by fixing my eyes upon the sea.

''You have evidence enough, you know, and if you haven't there's Price—she has plenty. So, since you've given me the right to speak for you, dear, I'm going to speak to your father first.''

I must have made some half-articulate response, for not understanding me he said:

''Oh, I know he'll be a hard nut to crack. He won't want to hear what I've got to say, but he has *got* to hear it. And after all you're his daughter, and if he has any bowels of compassion . . .''

Again I must have made some effort to speak, for he said:

''Yes, he's ill, but he has only to set Curphy to work and the lawyer will do the rest.''

I could not allow him to go any further, so I blurted out somehow that I had seen my father already.

''On this subject?''

''Yes.''

''And what did he say?''

I told him as well as I could what my father had said, being ashamed to repeat it.

''That was only bluff, though,'' said Martin. ''The real truth is that you would cease to be Lady Raa and that would be a blow to his pride. Then there would no longer be any possibility of establishing a family and that would disturb his plans. No matter! We can set Curphy to work ourselves.''

''But I have seen Mr. Curphy also,'' I said.

''And what did *he* say?''

I told him what the lawyer had said and he was aghast.

''Good heavens! What an iniquity! In England too! But never mind! There are other countries where this relic of the barbaric ages doesn't exist. We'll go there. We must get you a divorce somehow.''

My time had come. I could keep back the truth no longer.

''But Martin,'' I said, ''divorce is impossible for me—quite impossible.''

And then I told him that I had been to see the Bishop also, and he had said what I had known before, though in the pain of my temptation I had forgotten it, that the Catholic

Church did not countenance divorce under any circumstances, because God made marriages and therefore no man could dissolve them.

Martin listened intently, and in his eagerness to catch every word he raised himself to a kneeling position by my side, so that he was looking into my face.

"But Mary, my dear Mary," he said, "you don't mean to say you will allow such considerations to influence you?"

"I am a Catholic—what else can I do?" I said.

"But think—my dear, dear girl, think how unreasonable, how untrue, how preposterous it all is in a case like yours? God made your marriage? Yours? God married you to that notorious profligate? Can you believe it?"

His eyes were flaming. I dared not look at them.

"Then think again. They say there's no divorce in the Catholic Church, do they? But what are they talking about? Morally speaking you are a divorced woman already. Anybody with an ounce of brains can see that. When you were married to this man he made a contract with you, and he has broken the terms of it, hasn't he? Then where's the contract now? It doesn't any longer exist. Your husband has destroyed it."

"But isn't marriage different?" I asked.

And then I tried to tell him what the Bishop had said of the contract of marriage being unlike any other contract because God Himself had become a party to it.

"What?" he cried. "God become a party to a marriage like yours? My dear girl, only think! Think of what your marriage has been—the pride and vanity and self-seeking that conceived it, the compulsion that was put upon you to carry it through, and then the shame and the suffering and the wickedness and the sin of it! Was God a party to the making of a marriage like that?"

In his agitation he rose, walked two or three paces in front and came back to me.

"Then think what it means if your marriage may not be dissolved. It means that you must go on living with this man whose life is so degrading. Year in, year out, as long as your life lasts you must let him humiliate and corrupt you with his company, his companions and his example, until you are dragged down, down, down to the filth he lives in himself, and your very soul is contaminated. Is that what the Church asks of you?"

I answered no, and tried to tell him what the Bishop had told me about separation, but he interrupted me with a shout.

"Separation? Did he say that? If the Church has no right to divorce you what right has it to separate you? . . . Oh, I see what it will say—hope of reconciliation. But if you were separated from your husband would you ever go back to him? Never in this world. Then what would your separation be? Only divorce under another name."

I was utterly shaken. Perhaps I wanted to believe what Martin was saying; perhaps I did not know enough to answer him, but I could not help it if I thought Martin's clear mind was making dust and ashes of everything that Father Dan and the Bishop had said to me.

"Then what can I do?" I asked.

I thought his face quivered at that question. He got up again, and stood before me for a moment without speaking. Then he said, with an obvious effort—

"If your Church will not allow you to divorce your husband, and if you and I cannot marry without that, then . . ."

"Yes?"

"I didn't mean to propose it . . . God knows I didn't, but when a woman . . . when a woman has been forced into a loveless marriage, and it is crushing the very soul out of her, and the iron law of her Church will not permit her to escape from it, what crime does she commit if she . . ."

"Well?" I asked, though I saw what he was going to say.

"Mary," he said, breathing hard and fast, "you must come to me."

I made a sudden cry, though I tried not to.

"Oh, I know," he said. "It's not what we could wish. But we'll be open about it. We'll face it out. Why shouldn't we? I shall anyway. And if your father and the Bishop say anything to me I'll tell them what I think of the abominable marriage they forced you into. As for you, dear, I know you'll have to bear something. All the conventional canting hypocrisies! Every man who has bought his wife, and every woman who has sold herself into concubinage—there are thousands and thousands of them all the world over, and they'll try . . . perhaps they'll try . . . but let them try. If they want to trample the life out of you they'll have to walk over me first—yes, by God they will!"

"But Martin . . ."

"Well?"

"Do you mean that I . . . I am . . . to . . . to live with you without marriage?"

"It's the only thing possible, isn't it?" he said. And then he tried to show me that love was everything, and if people loved each other nothing else mattered—religious ceremonies were nothing, the morality of society was nothing, the world and its back-biting was nothing.

The great moment had come for me at last, and though I felt torn between love and pity I had to face it.

"Martin, I . . . I can't do it," I said.

He looked steadfastly into my face for a moment, but I dare not look back, for I knew he was suffering.

"You think it would be wrong?"

"Yes."

"A sin?"

I tried to say "Yes" again, but my reply died in my throat.

There was another moment of silence and then, in a faltering voice that nearly broke me down, he said:

"In that case there is nothing more to say. . . . There isn't, is there?"

I made an effort to speak, but my voice would not come.

"I thought . . . as there was no other way of escape from this terrible marriage . . . but if you think . . ."

He stopped, and then coming closer he said:

"I suppose you know what this means for you, Mary—that after all the degradation you have gone through you are shutting the door to a worthier, purer life, and that . . ."

I could bear no more. My heart was yearning for him, yet I was compelled to speak.

"But would it be a purer life, Martin, if it began in sin? No, no, it wouldn't, it couldn't. Oh, you can't think how hard it is to deny myself the happiness you offer me. It's harder than all the miseries my husband has inflicted upon me. But it wouldn't be happiness, because our sin would stand between us. That would always be there, Martin—every day, every night, as long as ever we lived. . . . We should never know one really happy hour. I'm sure we should not. I should be unhappy myself and I should make you unhappy. Oh, I daren't! I daren't! Don't ask me, I beg—I beseech you."

I burst into tears after this, and there was a long silence between us. Then Martin touched my arm and said with a gentleness that nearly broke my heart:

"Don't cry, Mary. I give in. I find I have no will but yours, dear. If *you* can bear the present condition of things, *I* ought to be able to. Let us go back to the house."

He raised me to my feet and we turned our faces homeward.

All the brightness of the day had gone for both of us by this time. The tide was now far out. Its moaning was only a distant murmur. The shore was a stretch of jagged black rocks covered with sea-weed.

SIXTY-SEVENTH CHAPTER

NOTWITHSTANDING Martin's tenderness I had a vague fear that he had only pretended to submit to my will, and before the day was over I had proof of it.

During dinner we spoke very little, and after it was over we went out to the balcony to sit on a big oak seat which stood there.

It was another soft and soundless night, without stars, very dark, and with an empty echoing air, which seemed to say that thunder was not far off, for the churning of the nightjar vibrated from the glen, and the distant roar of the tide, now rising, was like the rumble of drums at a soldier's funeral.

Just as we sat down the pleasure-steamer we had seen in the morning re-crossed our breadth of sea on its way back to Blackwater; and lit up on deck and in all its port-holes, it looked like a floating *café chantant* full of happy people, for they were singing in chorus a rugged song which Martin and I had known all our lives—

Ramsey town, Ramsey town, smiling by the sea,
Here's a health to my true love, wheresoe'er she be.

When the steamer had passed into darkness, Martin said:

"I don't want to hurt you again, Mary, but before I go there's something I want to know. . . . If you cannot divorce your husband, and if . . . if you cannot come to me what . . . what is left to us?"

I tried to tell him there was only one thing left to us, and (as much for myself as for him) I did my best to picture the spiritual heights and beauties of renunciation.

"Does that mean that we are to . . . to part?" he said. "You going your way and I going mine . . . never to meet again?"

That cut me to the quick, so I said—it was all I could trust myself to say—that the utmost that was expected of us was that we should govern our affections—control and conquer them.

"Do you mean that we are to stamp them out altogether?" he said.

That cut me to the quick too, and I felt like a torn bird that is struggling in the lime, but I contrived to say that if our love was guilty love it was our duty to destroy it.

"Is that possible?" he said.

"We must ask God to help us," I answered, and then, while his head was down and I was looking out into the darkness, I tried to say that though he was suffering now he would soon get over this disappointment.

"Do you *wish* me to get over it?" he asked.

This confused me terribly, for in spite of all I was saying I knew at the bottom of my heart that in the sense he intended I did not and could not wish it.

"We have known and cared for each other all our lives, Mary—isn't that so? It seems as if there never was a time when we didn't know and care for each other. Are we to pray to God, as you say, that a time may come when we shall feel as if we had never known and cared for each other at all?"

My throat was fluttering—I could not answer him.

"*I* can't," he said. "I never shall—never as long as I live. No prayers will ever help me to forget you."

I could not speak. I dared not look at him. After a moment he said in a thicker voice:

"And you . . . will you be able to forget *me?* By praying to God will you be able to wipe me out of your mind?"

I felt as if something were strangling me.

"A woman lives in her heart, doesn't she?" he said. "Love is everything to her . . . everything except her religion. Will it be possible—this renunciation . . . will it be possible for you either?"

I felt as if all the blood in my body were running away from me.

"It will not. You know it will not. You will never be able to renounce your love. Neither of us will be able to renounce it. It isn't possible. It isn't human. . . . Well, what then? If we continue to love each other—you here and I down there—we shall be just as guilty in the eyes of the Church, shan't we?"

I did not answer him, and after a moment he came closer to me on the seat and said almost in a whisper:

"Then think again, Mary. Only give one glance to the horrible life that is before you when I am gone. You have been married a year . . . only a year . . . and you have suffered terribly. But there is worse to come. Your husband's coarse infidelity has been shocking, but there will be something more shocking than his infidelity—his affection. Have you never thought of *that?*"

I started and shuddered, feeling as if somebody must have told him the most intimate secret of my life. Coming still closer he said:

"Forgive me, dear. I'm bound to speak plainly now. If I didn't I should never forgive myself in the future . . . Listen! Your husband will get over his fancy for this . . . this woman. He'll throw her off, as he has thrown off women of the same kind before. What will happen then? He'll remember that you belong to him . . . that he has rights in you . . . that you are his wife and he is your husband . . . that the infernal law which denies you the position of an equal human being gives him a right—a legal right—to compel your obedience. Have you never thought of *that?*"

For one moment we looked into each other's eyes; then he took hold of my hand and, speaking very rapidly, said:

"That's the life that is before you when I am gone—to live with this man whom you loathe . . . year after year, as long as life lasts . . . occupying the same house, the same room, the same . . ."

I uttered an involuntary cry and he stopped.

"Martin," I said, "there is something you don't know."

And then, I told him—it was forced out of me—my modesty went down in the fierce battle with a higher pain, and I do not know whether it was my pride or my shame or my love that compelled me to tell him, but I *did* tell him—God knows how—that I could not run the risk he referred to because I was not in that sense my husband's wife and never had been.

The light was behind me, and my face was in the darkness; but still I covered it with my hands while I stammered out the story of my marriage day and the day after, and of the compact I had entered into with my husband that only when and if I came to love him should he claim my submission as a wife.

While I was speaking I knew that Martin's eyes were fixed on me, for I could feel his breath on the back of my hands, but before I had finished he leapt up and cried excitedly:

"And that compact has been kept?"

"Yes."

"Then it's all right! Don't be afraid. You shall be free. Come in and let me tell you how! Come in, come in!"

He took me back into the boudoir. I had no power to resist him. His face was as pale as death, but his eyes were shining. He made me sit down and then sat on the table in front of me.

"Listen!" he said. "When I bought my ship from the Lieutenant we signed a deed, a contract, as a witness before all men that he would give me his ship and I would give him some money. But if after all he hadn't given me his ship what would our deed have been? Only so much waste paper."

It was the same with my marriage. If it had been an honest contract, the marriage service would have been a witness before God that we meant to live together as man and wife. But I never had, therefore what was the marriage service? Only an empty ceremony!

"That's the plain sense of the matter, isn't it?" he cried. "I defy any priest in the world to prove the contrary."

"Well?"

"Well, don't you see what it comes to? You are free—morally free at all events. You can come to me. You must, too. I daren't leave you in this house any longer. I shall take you to London and fix you up there, and then, when I come back from the Antarctic . . ."

He was glowing with joy, but a cold hand suddenly seized me, for I had remembered all the terrors of excommunication as Father Dan had described them.

"But Martin," I said, "would the Church accept that?"

"What matter whether it would or wouldn't? Our consciences would be clear. There would be no sin, and what you were saying this morning would not apply."

"But if I left my husband I couldn't marry you, could I?"

"Perhaps not."

"Then the Church would say that I was a sinful woman living a sinful life, wouldn't it?"

"But you wouldn't be."

"All the same the Church would say so, and if it did I should be cut out of communion, and if I were cut out of communion I should be cast out of the Church, and if I were cast out of the Church . . . what would become of me then?"

"But, my dear, dear girl," said Martin, "don't you see that this is not the same thing at all? It is only a case of a ceremony. And why should a mere ceremony—even if we cannot do away with it— darken a woman's life for ever?''

My heart was yearning for love, but my soul was crying out for salvation; and not being able to answer him for myself, I told him what Father Dan had said I was to say.

''Father Dan is a saint and I love him,'' he said. ''But what can he know—what can any priest know of a situation like this? The law of man has tied you to this brute, but the law of God has given you to me. Why should a marriage service stand between us?''

''But it does,'' I said. ''And we can't alter it. No, no, I dare not break the law of the Church. I am a weak, wretched girl, but I cannot give up my religion.''

After that Martin did not speak for a moment. Then he said:

''You mean that, Mary?''

''Yes.''

And then my heart accused me so terribly of the crime of resisting him that I took his hand and held his fingers in a tight lock while I told him—what I had never meant to tell—how long and how deeply I had loved him, but nevertheless I dared not face the thought of living and dying without the consolations of the Church.

''I dare not! I dare not!'' I said. ''I should be a broken-hearted woman if I did, and you don't want that, do you?''

He listened in silence, though the irregular lines in his face showed the disordered state of his soul and when I had finished a wild look came into his eyes and he said:

''I am disappointed in you, Mary. I thought you were brave and fearless, and that when I showed you a way out of your miserable entanglement you would take it in spite of everything.''

His voice was growing thick again. I could scarcely bear to listen to it.

''Do you suppose I *wanted* to take up the position I proposed to you? Not I. No decent man ever does. But I love you so dearly that I was willing to make that sacrifice and count it as nothing if only I could rescue you from the misery of your abominable marriage.''

Then he broke into a kind of fierce laughter, and said:

''It seems I wasn't wanted, though. You say in effect that my love is sinful and criminal, and that it will imperil your soul. So I'm only making mischief here and the sooner I get away the better for everybody.''

He threw off my hand, stepped to the door to the balcony, and looking out into the darkness said, between choking laughter and sobs:

''Ellan, you are no place for me. I can't bear the sight of you any longer. I used to think you were the dearest spot on earth, because you were the home of her who would follow me to the ends of the earth if I wanted her, but I was wrong. She loves me less than a wretched ceremony, and would sacrifice my happiness to a miserable bit of parchment.''

My heart was clamouring loud. Never had I loved him so much as now. I had to struggle with myself not to throw myself into his arms.

''No matter!'' he said. ''I should be a poor-spirited fool to stay where I'm not wanted. I must get back to my work. The sooner the better, too. I thought I should be counting the days down there until I could come home again. But why should I? And why should I care what happens to me? It's all as one now.''

He stepped back from the balcony with a resolute expression on his gloomy face, and I thought for a moment (half hoping and half fearing it) that he was going to lay hold of me and tell me I must do what he wished because I belonged to him.

But he only looked at me for a moment in silence, and then burst into a flood of tears, and turned and ran out of the house.

Let who will say his tears were unmanly. To me they were the bitter cry of a great heart, and I wanted to follow him and say, ''Take me. Do what you like with me. I am yours.''

I did not do so. I sat a long time where he had left me and then I went into my room and locked the door.

I did not cry. Unjust and cruel as his reproaches had been, I began to have a strange wild joy in them. I knew that he would not have insulted me like that if he had not loved me to the very verge of madness itself.

Hours passed. Price came tapping at my door to ask if she should lock up the house—meaning the balcony. I answered ''No, go to bed.''

I heard the deadened thud of Martin's footsteps on the lawn passing to and fro. Sometimes they paused under my window and then I had a feeling, amounting to certainty, that he was listening to hear if I was sobbing, and that if I had been he would have broken down my bedroom door to get to me.

At length I heard him come up the stone stairway, shut and bolt the balcony door, and walk heavily across the corridor to his own room.

The day was then dawning. It was four o'clock.

SIXTY-EIGHTH CHAPTER

I AWOKE on Wednesday morning in a kind of spiritual and physical fever. Every conflicting emotion which a woman can experience in the cruel battle between her religion and her love seemed to flood body and soul—joy, pain, pride, shame, fear, rapture—so that I determined (not without cause) to make excuse of a headache to stay in bed.

Although it was the last day of Martin's visit, and I charged myself with the discourtesy of neglecting him, as well as the folly of losing the few remaining hours of his company, I thought I could not without danger meet him again.

I was afraid of him, but I was still more afraid of myself.

Recalling my last sight of his face as he ran out of the house, and knowing well the desire of my own heart, I felt that if I spent another day in his company it would be impossible to say what might happen.

As a result of this riot of emotions I resolved to remain all day in my room, and towards evening to send out a letter bidding him good-bye and good-luck. It would be a cold end to a long friendship and my heart was almost frozen at the thought of it, but it was all I dared do and I saw no help for it.

But how little did I know what was written in the Book of Fate for me!

First came Price on pretence of bathing my forehead, and she bombarded me with accounts of Martin's anxiety. When he had heard that I was ill he had turned as white as if sixteen ounces of blood had been taken out of him. It nearly broke me up to hear that, but Price, who was artful, only laughed and said:

"Men *are* such funny things, bless them! To think of that fine young man, who is big enough to fell an ox and brave enough to face a lion, being scared to death because a little lady has a headache."

All morning she was in and out of my room with similar stories, and towards noon she brought me a bunch of roses wet with the dew, saying that Tommy the Mate had sent them.

"Are you sure it was Tommy the Mate?" I asked, whereupon the sly thing, who was only waiting to tell the truth, though she pretended that I was forcing it out of her, admitted that the flowers were from Martin, and that he had told her not to say so.

"What's he doing now?" I asked.

"Writing a letter," said Price, "and judging by the times he has torn it up and started again and wiped his forehead, it must be a tough job, I can tell you."

I thought I knew whom the letter was meant for, and before luncheon it came up to me.

It was the first love letter I had ever had from Martin, and it melted me like wax over a candle. I have it still, and though Martin is such a great man now, I am tempted to copy it out just as it was written with all its appearance of irreverence (none, I am sure, was intended), and even its bad spelling, for without that it would not be Martin—my boy who could never learn his lessons.

"Dear Mary,—I am destroyed to here how ill you are, and when I think it's all my fault I am ready to kick myself.

"Don't worry about what I was saying last night. I was mad to think what might happen to you while I should be down there, but I've been thinking it over since and I've come to the conclusion that if their is anything to God He can be trusted to look after you without any help from me, so when we meet again before I go away we'll never say another word on the subject—that's a promice.

"I can't go until your better though, so I'm just sending the jaunting car into town with a telegram to London telling them to postpone the expedision on account of illness, and if they think it's mine it won't matter because it's something worse.

"But if you are realy a bit better, as your maid says, you might come to the window and wave your hand to me, and I shall be as happy as a sand-boy. "Yours,

"Mart."

To this letter (forgetting my former fears) I returned an immediate verbal reply, saying I was getting better rapidly and hoped to be up to dinner, so he must not send that telegram to London on any account, seeing that nobody knew what was going to happen and everything was in the hands of God.

Price took my message with a knowing smile at the corner of her mouth, and a few minutes afterwards I heard Martin laughing with Tommy the Mate at the other end of the lawn.

I don't know why I took so much pains with my dress that night. I did not expect to see Martin again. I was sending him away from me. Yet never before had I dressed myself with so much care. I put on the soft white satin gown which was made for me in Cairo, a string of pearls over my hair, and another (a tight one) about my neck.

Martin was waiting for me in the boudoir, and to my surprise he had dressed too, but, except that he wore a soft silk shirt, I did not know what he was wearing, or whether he looked handsome or not, because it was Martin and that was all that mattered to me.

I am sure my footstep was light as I entered the room, for I was shod in white satin slippers, but Martin heard it, and I saw his eyes fluttering as he looked at me, and said something sweet about a silvery fir tree with its little dark head against the sky.

"It's to be a truce, isn't it?" he asked.

"Yes, a truce," I answered, which meant that as this was to be our last evening together all painful subjects were to be put aside.

Before we sat down to eat he took me out on to the balcony to look at the sea, for though there was no rain flashes of sheet lightning with low rumbling of distant thunder lit up the water for a moment with visions of heavenly beauty, and then were devoured by the grim and greedy darkness.

During dinner we kept faith with each other. In order to avoid the one subject that was uppermost in both our minds, we played at being children, and pretended it was the day we sailed to St. Mary's Rock.

Thinking back to that time, and all the incidents which he had thought so heroic and I so tragic, we dropped into the vernacular, and I called him "boy" and he called me "bogh millish," and at every racy word that came up from the forgotten cells of our brains we shrieked with laughter.

When Martin spoke of his skipper I asked "Is he a stunner?" When he mentioned one of his scientific experts I inquired "Is he any good?" And after he had told me that he hoped to take possession of some island in the name of the English crown, and raise the Union Jack on it, I said: "Do or die, we allus does that when we're out asploring."

How we laughed! He laughed because I laughed, and I laughed because he was laughing. I had some delicious moments of femininity too (such as no woman can resist), until it struck me suddenly that in all this make-believe we were making love to each other again. That frightened me for a time, but I told myself that everything was safe as long as we could carry on the game.

It was not always easy to do so, though, for some of our laughter had tears behind it, and some of our memories had an unexpected sting, because things had a meaning for us now which they never had before, and we were compelled to realise what life had done for us.

Thus I found my throat throbbing when I recalled the loss of our boat, leaving us alone together on that cruel rock with the rising tide threatening to submerge us, and I nearly choked when I repeated my last despairing cry: "I'm not a stunner! . . . and you'll have to give me up . . . and leave me here, and save yourself."

It was like walking over a solfataro with the thin hot earth ready to break up under our feet.

To escape from it I sat down at the piano and began to sing. I dared not sing the music I loved best—the solemn music of the convent—so I sang some of the nonsense songs I had heard in the streets. At one moment I twisted round on the piano stool and said:

"I'll bet you anything"—(I always caught Martin's tone in Martin's company), "you can't remember the song I sang sitting in the boat with William Rufus on my lap."

"I'll bet you anything I can," said Martin.

"Oh, no, you can't," I said.

"Have it as you like, bogh, but sing it for all," said Martin, and then I sang—

"Oh, Sally's the gel for me,
Our Sally's the gel for me,
I'll marry the gel that I love best,
When I come back from sea."

But that arrow of memory had been sharpened on Time's grindstone and it seemed to pierce through us, so Martin proposed that we should try the rollicking chorus which the excursionists had sung on the pleasure-steamer the night before.

He did not know a note of music and he had no more voice than a corn-crake, but crushing up on to the music-stool by my side, he banged away with his left hand while I played with my right, and we sang together in a wild delightful discord—

> *"Ramsey town, Ramsey town, smiling by the sea,*
> *Here's a health to my true love, wheresoe'er she be."*

We laughed again when that was over, but I knew I could not keep it up much longer, and every now and then I forgot that I was in my boudoir and seemed to see that lonesome plateau, twelve thousand feet above the icy barrier that guards the Pole, and Martin toiling through blizzards over rolling waves of snow.

Towards midnight we went out on to the balcony to look at the lightning for the last time. The thunder was shaking the cliffs and rolling along them like cannon-balls, and Martin said:

"It sounds like the breaking of the ice down there."

When we returned to the room he told me he would have to be off early in the morning, before I was out of bed, having something to do in Blackwater, where "the boys were getting up a spree of some sort."

In this way he rattled on for some minutes, obviously talking himself down and trying to prevent me from thinking. But the grim moment came at last, and it was like the empty gap of time when you are waiting for the whirring of the clock that is to tell the end of the old year and the beginning of the new.

My cuckoo clock struck twelve. Martin looked at me. I looked at him. Our eyes fell. He took my hand. It was cold and moist. His own was hot and trembling.

"So this is . . . the end," he said.

"Yes . . . the end," I answered.

"Well, we've had a jolly evening to finish up with, anyway," he said. "I shall always remember it."

I tried to say he would soon have other evenings to think about that would make him forget this one

"Never in this world!" he answered.

I tried to wish him good luck, and great success, and a happy return to fame and fortune.

He looked at me with his great liquid eyes and said:

"Aw, well, that's all as one now."

I tried to tell him it would always be a joy to me to remember that he and I had been such great, great friends.

He looked at me again, and answered:

"That's all as one also."

I reproached myself for the pain I was causing him, and to keep myself in countenance I began to talk of the beauty and nobility of renunciation—each sacrificing for the other's sake all sinful thoughts and desires.

"Yes, I'm doing what you wish," he said. "I can't deny you anything."

That cut me deep, so I went on to say that if I had acted otherwise I should always have had behind me the memory of the vows I had broken, the sacrament I had violated, and the faith I had abandoned.

"All the same we might have been very happy," he said, and then my throat became so thick that I could not say any more.

After a few moments he said:

"It breaks my heart to leave you. But I suppose I must, though I don't know what is going to happen."

"All that is in God's hands," I said.

"Yes," said Martin, "it's up to Him now."

It made my heart ache to look at his desolate face, so, struggling hard with my voice, I tried to tell him he must not despair.

"You are so young," I said. "Surely the future holds much happiness for you."

And then, though I knew that the bare idea of another woman taking the love I was turning away would have made the world a blank for me, I actually said something about the purest joys of love falling to his lot some day.

"No, by the Lord God," said Martin. "There'll be no other woman for me. If I'm not to have you I'll wear the willow for you the same as if you were dead."

There was a certain pain in that, but there was a thrill of secret joy in it too.

He was still holding my hand. We held each other's hands a long time. In spite of my affected resignation I could not let his hand go. I felt as if I were a drowning woman and his hand were my only safety. Nevertheless I said:

"We must say good-night and good-bye now."

"And if it is for ever?"

"Don't say that."

"But if it is?"

"Well, then . . .. for ever."

"At least give me something to take away with me," he said.

"Better not," I answered, but even as I spoke I dropped the handkerchief which I had been holding in my other hand and he picked it up.

I knew that my tears, though I was trying to keep them back, were trickling down my cheeks. I saw that his face was all broken up as it had been the night before.

There was a moment of silence in which I was conscious of nothing but the fierce beating of my pulse, and then he raised my hand to his lips, dropped it gently and walked over to the door.

But after he had opened it he turned and looked at me. I looked at him, longing, craving, hungering for his love as for a flame at which my heart could warm itself.

Then came a blinding moment. It seemed as if in an instant he lost all control of himself, and his love came rushing upon him like a mighty surging river.

Flinging the door back he returned to me with long strides, and snatching me up in his great arms, he lifted me off my feet, clasped me tightly to him, kissed me passionately on the mouth and cried in a quivering, husky voice:

"You are my wife. I am your real husband. I am not leaving you because you are married to this brute, but for the sake of your soul. We love each other. We shall continue to love each other. No matter where you are, or what they do with you, you are mine and always will be."

My blood was boiling. The world was reeling round me. There was a roaring in my brain. All my spiritual impulses had gone. I was a woman, and it was the same to me as if the primordial man had taken possession of me by sheer force. Yet I was not afraid of that. I rejoiced in it. I wanted to give myself up to it.

But the next moment Martin had dropped me, and fled from the room, clashing the door behind him.

I felt as if a part of myself had been torn from my breast and had gone out with him.

The room seemed to become dark.

SIXTY-NINTH CHAPTER

For a moment I stood where Martin had left me, throbbing through and through like an open wound, telling myself that he had gone, that I should never see him again, and that I had driven him away from me.

Those passionate kisses had deprived me of the power of consecutive thought. I could only feel. And the one thing I felt above everything else was that the remedy I had proposed to myself for my unhappy situation—renunciation—was impossible, because Martin was a part of my own being and without him I could not live.

"Martin! Martin! My love! My love!" cried the voice of my heart.

In fear lest I had spoken the words aloud, and in terror of what I might do under the power of them, I hurried into my bedroom and locked and bolted the door.

But the heart knows nothing of locks and bolts, and a moment afterwards my spirit was following Martin to his room. I was seeing him as I had seen him last, with his face full of despair, and I was accusing myself of the pain I had caused him.

I had conquered Martin, but I had conquered myself also. I had compelled him to submit, but his submission had vanquished me.

Even if I had a right to impose renunciation on myself, what right had I to impose it upon him, who did not desire it, did not think it necessary, was not reconciled to it, and only accepted it out of obedience to my will?

He loved me. No man ever loved a woman more dearly. He deserved to be loved in return. He had done nothing to forfeit love. He was bound by no ties. And yet I was driving him away from me. What right had I to do so?

I began to see that I had acted throughout with the most abominable selfishness. In his great love he had said little or nothing about himself. But why had *I* not thought of him? In the struggles of my religious conscience I had been thinking of myself alone, but Martin had been suffering too, and I had never once really thought of that? What *right* had I to make him suffer?

After a while I began to prepare for bed, but it took me long to undress, for I stopped every moment to think.

I thought of the long years Martin had been waiting for me, and while I was telling myself that he had kept pure for my sake, my heart was beating so fast that I could hardly bear the strain of it.

It cut me still deeper to think that even as there had been no other woman for him in the past so there would be no other in the future. Never as long as he lived! I was as sure of that as of the breath I breathed, and when I remembered what he had said about wearing the willow for me as if I were dead I was almost distracted.

His despairing words kept ringing mercilessly in my ears—"It's all as one now"; "How happy we might have been." I wanted to go to him and tell him that though I was sending him away still I loved him, and it was *because* I loved him that I was sending him away.

I had made one step towards the door before I remembered that it was too late to carry out my purpose. The opportunity had passed. Martin had gone to his room. He might even be in bed by this time.

But there are spiritual influences which control our bodies independently of our will. I put on my dressing-gown (being partly undressed) and went back to the boudoir. I hardly knew what impulse impelled me to do so, and neither do I know why I went from the boudoir to the balcony unless it was in hope of the melancholy joy of standing once more where Martin and I had stood together a little while ago.

I was alone now. The low thunder was still rolling along the cliffs, but I hardly heard it. The white sheet lightning was still pulsing in the sky and rising, as it seemed, out of the sea, but I hardly saw it.

At one moment I caught a glimpse of a solitary fishing boat, under its brown lugger sails, heading towards Blackwater; at the next moment my eyes were dazzled as by a flashlight from some unseen battleship.

Leaning over the balcony and gazing into the intermittent darkness I pictured to myself the barren desolation of Martin's life after he had left me. Loving me so much he might fall into some excess, perhaps some vice, and if that happened what would be the measure of my responsibility?

Losing me he might lose his faith in God. I had read of men becoming spiritual castaways after they had lost their anchorage in some great love, and I asked myself what should I do if Martin became an infidel.

And when I told myself that I could only save Martin's soul by sacrificing my own I was overwhelmed by a love so great that I thought I could do even that.

"Martin! Martin! Forgive me, forgive me," I cried.

I felt so hot that I opened my dressing-gown to cool my bare breast. After a while I began to shiver and then fearing I might take cold I went back to the boudoir, and sat down.

I looked at my cuckoo clock. It was half-past twelve. Only half an hour since Martin had left me! It seemed like hours and hours. What of the years and years of my life that I had still to spend without him?

The room was so terribly silent, yet it seemed to be full of our dead laughter. The ghost of our happiness seemed to haunt it. I was sure I could never live in it again.

I wondered what Martin would be doing now. Would he be in bed and asleep, or sitting up like this, and thinking of me as I was thinking of him?

At one moment I thought I heard his footsteps. I listened, but the sound stopped. At another moment, covering my face with my hands, I thought I saw him in his room, as plainly as if there were no walls dividing us. He was holding out his hands to me, and his face had the yearning, loving, despairing expression which it had worn when he looked back at me from the door.

At yet another moment I thought I heard him calling me.

"Mary!"

I listened again, but again all was still, and when I told myself that if in actual fact he had spoken my name it was perhaps only to himself (as I was speaking his) my heart throbbed up to my throat.

Once more I heard his voice.

"Mary!"

I could bear no more. Martin wanted me. I must go to him. Though body and soul were torn asunder I must go.

Before I knew what I was doing I had opened the door and was walking across the corridor in the direction of Martin's room.

The house was dark. Everybody had gone to bed. Light as my footsteps were, the landing was creaking under me. I knew that the floors of the grim old Castle sometimes made noises when nobody walked on them, but none the less I felt afraid.

Half way to Martin's door I stopped. A ghostly hand seemed to be laid on my shoulder and a ghostly voice seemed to say in my ear:

"Wait! Reflect! If you do what you are thinking of doing what will happen? You will become an outcast. The whole body of your own sex will turn against you. You will be a bad woman."

I knew what it was. It was my conscience speaking to me in the voice of my Church—my Church, the mighty, irresistible power that was separating me from Martin. I was its child, born in its bosom, but if I broke its laws it would roll over me like a relentless Juggernaut.

It was not at first that I could understand why the Church should set itself up against my Womanhood. My Womanhood was crying out for life and love and liberty. But the Church, in its inexorable, relentless voice, was saying, "Thou Shalt Not!"

After a moment of impenetrable darkness, within and without, I thought I saw things more plainly. The Church was the soul of the world. It stood for purity, which alone could hold the human family together. If all women who had made unhappy marriages were to do as I was thinking of doing (no matter under what temptation) the world would fall to wreck and ruin.

Feeling crushed and ashamed, and oh, so little and weak, I groped my way back to the boudoir and closed the door.

Then a strange thing happened—one of those little accidents of life which seem to be thrown off by the mighty hand of Fate. A shaft of light from my bedroom, crossing the end of my writing-desk, showed me a copy of a little insular newspaper.

The paper, which must have come by the evening post, had probably been opened by Martin, and for that reason only I took it up and glanced at it.

The first thing that caught my eye was a short report headed "Charity Performance."

It ran:

"*The English ladies and gentlemen from Castle Raa who are cruising round the island in the handsome steam yacht, the* Cleopatra, *gave a variety entertainment last night in aid of the Catholic Mission at the Palace, Ravenstown.*

"*At the end of the performance the Lord Bishop, who was present in person and watched every item of the programme* *with obvious enjoyment, proposed a vote of thanks in his usual felicitous terms, thanking Lord Raa for this further proof of his great liberality of mind in helping a Catholic charity, and particularly mentioning the beautiful and accomplished Madame Lier, who had charmed all eyes and won all hearts by her serpentine dances, and to whom the Church in Ellan would always be indebted for the handsome sum which had been the result of her disinterested efforts in promoting the entertainment.*

"It is understood that the Cleopatra *will leave Ravenstown Harbour to-morrow morning on her way back to Port Raa."*

That was the end of everything. It came upon me like a torrent and swept all my scruples away.

Such was the purity of the Church—threatening *me* with its censures for wishing to follow the purest dictates of my heart, yet taking money from a woman like Alma, who was bribing it to be blind to her misconduct and to cover her with its good-will!

My husband too—his infidelities were flagrant and notorious, yet the Church, through its minister, was flattering his vanity and condoning his offences!

He was coming back to me, too—this adulterous husband, and when he came the Church would require that I should keep "true faith" with him, whatever his conduct, and deny myself the pure love that was now awake within me.

But no, no, no! Never again! It would be a living death. Accursed be the power that could doom a woman to a living death!

Perhaps I was no longer sane—morally sane—and if so God and the Church will forgive me. But seeing that neither the Church nor the Law could liberate me from this bond which I did not make, that both were shielding the evil man and tolerating the bad woman, my whole soul rose in revolt.

I told myself now that to leave my husband and go to Martin would be to escape from shame to honour.

I saw Martin's despairing face again as I had seen it at the moment of our parting, and my brain rang with his passionate words. "You are my wife. I am your real husband. We love each other. We shall continue to love each other. No matter where you are, or what they do with you, you are mine and always will be."

Something was crying out within me: "Love him! Tell him you love him. Now, now! He is going away. To-morrow will be too late. Go to him. This will be your true marriage. The other was only legalised and sanctified prostitution."

I leapt up, and tearing the door open, I walked with strong steps across the corridor towards Martin's room.

My hair was down, my arms were bare in the ample sleeves of my dressing-gown, and my breast was as open as it had been on the balcony, but I thought nothing of all that.

I did not knock at Martin's door. I took hold of the handle as one who had a right. It turned of itself and the door opened.

My mind was in a whirl, black rings were circling round my eyes, but I heard my trembling, quivering, throbbing voice, as if it had been the voice of somebody else, saying:

"Martin, I am coming in."

Then my heart which had been beating violently seemed to stop. My limbs gave way. I was about to fall.

At the next moment strong arms were around me. I had no fear. But there was a roaring in my brain such as the ice makes when it is breaking up.

> Oh, you good women, who are happy in the love that guards you, shields you, shelters you, wraps you round and keeps you pure and true, tread lightly over the prostrate soul of your sister in her hour of trial and fierce temptation.
>
> And you blessed and holy saints who kneel before the Mother of all Mothers, take the transgression of her guilty child to Him who—long ago in the house of the self-righteous Pharisee—said to the woman who was a sinner and yet loved much—the woman who had washed His feet with her tears and dried them with the hair of her head—"Thy sins are forgiven thee."

FIFTH PART

I BECOME A MOTHER

SEVENTIETH CHAPTER

Next morning, at half-past eight, my Martin left me.

We were standing together in the boudoir between the table and the fire, which was burning briskly, for the sultry weather had gone in the night, and the autumn air was keen, though the early sun was shining.

At the last moment he was unwilling to go, and it was as much as I could do to persuade him. Perhaps it is one of the mysteries which God alone can read that our positions seemed to have been reversed since the day before.

He was confused, agitated, and full of self reproaches, while I felt no fear and no remorse, but only an indescribable joy, as if a new and gracious life had suddenly dawned on me.

"I don't feel that I can leave England now," he said.

"You can and you must," I answered, and then I spoke of his expedition as a great work which it was impossible to put off.

"Somebody else must do it, then," he said.

"Nobody else can, or shall," I replied.

"But our lives are for ever joined together now, and everything else must go by the board."

"Nothing shall go by the board for my sake, Martin. I refuse and forbid it."

Everything had been arranged, everything settled, great sums of money had been subscribed out of faith in him, and him only, and a large company was ready and waiting to sail under his command. He was the Man of Destiny, therefore nothing—nothing whatever—must keep him back.

"Then if I must go, you must go too," he said. "I mean you must go with me to London and wait there until I return."

"That is impossible," I answered.

The eyes of the world were on him now, and the heart of the world was with him. If I did what he desired it would reflect dishonour on his name, and he should not suffer for my sake under any circumstances.

"But think what may happen to you while I am away," he said.

"Nothing will happen while you are away, Martin."

"But how can you be so sure of the future when God alone knows what it is to be?"

"Then God will provide for it," I said, and with that last answer he had to be satisfied.

"You must take a letter from me at all events," said Martin, and sitting at my desk he began to write one.

It is amazing to me now when I come to think of it that I could have been so confident of myself and so indifferent to consequences. But I was thinking of one thing only—that Martin must go on his great errand, finish his great work and win his great reward, without making any sacrifice for me.

After a few minutes he rose from the desk and handed me his letter.

"Here it is," he said. "If the worst comes to the worst you may find it of some use some day."

I took it and doubled it and continued to hold it in my hand.

"Aren't you going to look at it!" he said.

"No."

"Not even to see whom it is written to?"

"That is unnecessary."

I thought I knew it was written to my husband or my father, and it did not matter to me which, for I had determined not to use it.

"It is open—won't you see what it says?"

"That is unnecessary also."

I thought I knew that Martin had tried to take everything upon himself, and I was resolved that he should not do so.

He looked at me with that worshipful expression which, seen in the eyes of the man who loves her, makes a woman proud to be alive.

"I feel as if I want to kiss the hem of your dress, Mary," he said, and after that there was a moment of heavenly silence.

It was now half-past eight—the hour when the motor-car had been ordered round to take him to the town—and though I felt as if I could shed drops of my blood to keep back the finger of my cuckoo clock I pointed it out and said it was time for him to go.

I think our parting was the most beautiful moment of all my life.

We were standing a little apart, for though I wanted to throw my arms about his neck at that last instant I would not allow myself to do so, because I knew that that would make it the harder for him to go.

I could see, too, that he was trying not to make it harder for me, so we stood in silence for a moment while my bosom heaved and his breath came quick.

Then he took my right hand in both of his hands and said:

"There is a bond between us now which can never be broken."

"Never," I answered.

"Whatever happens to either of us we belong to each other for ever."

"For ever and ever," I replied.

I felt his hands tighten at that, and after another moment of silence, he said:

"I may be a long time away, Mary."

"I can wait."

"Down there a man has to meet many dangers."

"You will come back. Providence will take care of you."

"I think it will. I feel I shall. But if I don't . . ."

I knew what he was trying to say. A shadow seemed to pass between us. My throat grew thick, and for a moment I could not speak. But then I heard myself say:

"Love is stronger than death; many waters cannot quench it."

His hands quivered, his whole body trembled, and I thought he was going to clasp me to his breast as before, but he only drew down my forehead with his hot hand and kissed it.

That was all, but a blinding mist seemed to pass before my eyes, and when it cleared the door of the room was open and my Martin was gone.

I stood where he had left me and listened.

I heard his strong step on the stone flags of the hall—he was going out at the porch.

I heard the metallic clashing of the door of the automobile—he was already in the car.

I heard the throb of the motor and ruckling of the gravel of the path—he was moving away.

I heard the dying down of the engine and the soft roll of the rubber wheels—I was alone.

For some moments after that the world seemed empty and void. But the feeling passed, and when I recovered my strength I found Martin's letter in my moist left hand.

Then I knelt before the fire, and putting the letter into the flames I burnt it.

SEVENTY-FIRST CHAPTER

Within two hours of Martin's departure I had regained complete possession of myself and was feeling more happy than I had ever felt before.

The tormenting compunctions of the past months were gone. It was just as if I had obeyed some higher law of my being and had become a freer and purer woman.

My heart leapt within me and to give free rein to the riot of my joy I put on my hat and cloak to go into the glen.

Crossing the garden I came upon Tommy the Mate, who told me there had been a terrific thunderstorm during the night, with torrential rain, which had torn up all the foreign plants in his flower-beds.

"It will do good, though," said the old man. "Clane out some of their dirty ould drains, I'm thinkin'."

Then he spoke of Martin, whom he had seen off, saying he would surely come back.

" 'Deed he will though. A boy like yander wasn't born to lave his bark in the ice and snow. . . . Not if his anchor's at home, anyway"—with a "glime" in my direction.

How the glen sang to me that morning! The great cathedral of nature seemed to ring with music—the rustling of the leaves overhead, the ticking of the insects underfoot, the bleating of the sheep, the lowing of the cattle, the light chanting of the stream, the deep organ-song of the sea, and then the swelling and soaring Gloria in my own bosom, which shot up out of my heart like a lark out of the grass in the morning.

I wanted to run, I wanted to shout, and when I came to the paths where Martin and I had walked together I wanted—silly as it sounds to say so—to go down on my knees and kiss the very turf which his feet had trod.

I took lunch in the boudoir as before, but I did not feel as if I were alone, for I had only to close my eyes and Martin, from the other side of the table, seemed to be looking across at me. And neither did I feel that the room was full of dead laughter, for our living voices seemed to be ringing in it still.

After tea I read again my only love-letter, revelling in the dear delightful errors in spelling which made it Martin's and nobody else's, and then I observed for the first time what was said about "the boys of Blackwater," and their intention of "getting up a spree."

This suggested that perhaps Martin had not yet left the island but was remaining for the evening steamer, in order to be present at some sort of celebrations to be given in his honour.

So at seven o'clock—it was dark by that time—I was down at the Quay, sitting in our covered automobile, which had been drawn up in a sheltered and hidden part of the pier, almost opposite the outgoing steamer.

Shall I ever forget the scene that followed?

First, came a band of music playing one of our native songs, which was about a lamb that had been lost in the snow, and how the Big Man of the Farm went out in search of it, and found it and brought it home in his arms.

Then came a double row of young men carrying flags and banners—fine, clean-limbed lads such as make a woman's heart leap to look at them.

Then came Martin in a jaunting car with a cheering crowd alongside of him, trying to look cheerful but finding it fearfully hard to do so.

And then—and this touched me most of all—a double line of girls in knitted woollen caps (such as men wear in frozen regions) over their heads and down the sides of their comely faces.

I was crying like a child at the sight of it all, but none the less I was supremely happy.

When the procession reached the gangway Martin disappeared into the steamer, and then the bandsmen ranged themselves in front of it, and struck up another song:

"Come back to Erin, mavourneen, mavourneen,
Come back, aroon, to the land of your birth."

In another moment every voice in the crowd seemed to take up the refrain.

That brought Martin on to the captain's bridge, where he stood bareheaded, struggling to smile.

By this time the last of the ship's bells had rung, the funnels were belching, and the captain's voice was calling on the piermen to clear away.

At last the hawsers were thrown off and the steamer started, but, with Martin still standing bareheaded on the bridge, the people rushed to the end of the pier to see the last of him.

There they sang again, louder than ever, the girls' clear voices above all the rest, as the ship sailed out into the dark sea.

"Come back to Erin, mavourneen, mavourneen,
Come back, aroon, to the land of your birth."

As well as I could, for the mist in my eyes was blinding me, I watched the steamer until she slid behind the headland of the bay, round the revolving light that stands on the point of it—stretching my neck through the window of the car, while the fresh wind from the sea smote my hot face and the salt air licked my parched lips. And then I fell back in my seat and cried for sheer joy of the love that was shown to Martin.

The crowd was returning down the pier by this time, like a black river running in the darkness and rumbling over rugged stones, and I heard their voices as they passed the car.

One voice—a female voice—said:

"Well, what do you think of *our* Martin Conrad?"

And then another voice—a male voice—answered:

"By God he's a Man!"

Within a few minutes the pier was deserted, and the chauffeur was saying:

"Home, my lady?"

"Home," I answered.

Seeing Martin off had been too much like watching the lifeboat on a dark and stormy night, when the lights dip behind a monstrous wave and for some breathless moments you fear they will never rise.

But as we drove up the head I caught the lights of the steamer again now far out at sea, and well I knew that as surely as my Martin was there he was thinking of me and looking back towards the house in which he had left me behind him.

When we reached the Castle I found to my surprise that every window was ablaze.

The thrum of the automobile brought Price into the hall.

She told me that the yachting party had come back, and were now in their bedrooms dressing for dinner.

As I went upstairs to my own apartments I heard trills of laughter from behind several of the closed doors, mingled with the muffled humming of various music-hall ditties.

And then suddenly a new spirit seemed to take possession of me, and I knew that I had become another woman.

MEMORANDUM BY MARTIN CONRAD

My darling was right. For a long hour after leaving Blackwater I continued to stand on the captain's bridge, looking back at the lighted windows of the house above Port Raa, and asking myself the question which for sixteen months thereafter was to haunt me day and night—Why had I left her behind me?

In spite of all her importunities, all her sweet unselfish thought of my own aims and interests, all her confidence in herself, all her brave determination to share responsibility for whatever the future might have in store for us—Why had I left her behind me?

The woman God gave me was mine—why had I left her in the house of a man who, notwithstanding his infidelities and brutalities, had a right in the eyes of the law, the church, and the world to call her his wife and to treat her accordingly?

Let me make no pretence of a penitence I did not feel. Never for one moment did I reproach myself for what had happened. Never for the shadow of a moment did I reproach her. She had given herself to me of her queenly right and sovereign grace as every good woman in the world must give herself to the man she loves if their union is to be pure and true.

But why did I not see then, as I see now, that it is the law of Nature—the cruel and at the same time the glorious law of Nature—that the woman shall bear the burden, the woman shall pay the price?

It is over now, and though many a time since my sweet girl has said out of her stainless heart that everything has worked out for the best, and suffering is God's salt for keeping our souls alive, when I think of what she went through for me, while I was out of all reach and sight, I know I shall never forgive myself for leaving her behind—never, never, never.
M. C.

[End of Martin Conrad's Memorandum]

SEVENTY-SECOND CHAPTER

As this will be the last time I shall have to speak of my husband's guests, I wish to repeat that I am trying to describe them without malice exactly as they were—selfish, cruel, ill-mannered, and insincere.

The dinner-bell rang while I was dressing, and on going downstairs a few minutes afterwards I found that there had been no attempt to wait for me.

Already the whole party were assembled at the table, my husband being at the foot of it, and Alma (incredible as it may seem) in the place of the hostess at the head.

This, in my altered mood, was more than I could bear, so, while the company made some attempt to welcome me with rather crude salutations, and old Mrs. Lier cried, "Come along here, my pore dear, and tell me how you've gotten on while we've been away" (indicating an empty seat by her side), I walked boldly up to Alma, put my hand on the back of her chair and said, "If you please."

Alma looked surprised. But after a moment she carried off the difficult situation by taking the seat which had been reserved for me beside her mother, by congratulating me on my improved appearance and herself on relief from the necessity of filling my place and discharging my responsible duties.

My husband, with the rest of the company, had looked up at the awkward incident, and I thought I saw by his curious grimace that he supposed my father (of whom he was always in fear) had told me to assert myself. But Alma, with surer instinct, was clearly thinking of Martin, and almost immediately she began to speak of him.

"So your great friend has just gone, dearest. The servants are crazy about him. We've missed him again, you see. Too bad! I hope you gave him our regrets and excuses—did you?"

The evil one must have taken hold of me by this time, for I said:

"I certainly did not, Alma."

"Why not, my love?"

"Because we have a saying in our island that it's only the ass that eats the cushag"—a bitter weed that grows in barren places.

Alma joined in the general laughter which followed this rather intemperate reply, and then led off the conversation on the incidents of the cruise.

I gathered that, encouraged by her success in capturing the Bishop by her entertainment, she had set herself to capture the "aristocracy" of our island by inviting them to a dance on the yacht, while it lay at anchor off Holmtown, and the humour of the moment was to play battledore and shuttlecock with the grotesque efforts of our great people (the same that had figured at my wedding) to grovel before my husband and his guests.

"I say, Jimmy," cried Mr. Vivian in his shrill treble, "do you remember the old gal in the gauze who—etc. . . . "

"But do you remember," cried Mr. Eastcliff, "the High Bailiff or Bum Bailiff with the bottle-nose who—etc. . . . ?"

"Killing, wasn't it, Vivian?" said one of the ladies.

"Perfectly killing," said everybody.

This shocking exhibition of bad manners had not gone on very long before I became aware that it was being improvised for my benefit.

After Alma had admitted that the Bishop was a "great flirt" of hers, and Mr. Vivian, amid shouts of laughter, had christened him her "crush," she turned to me and said, with her smiling face slightly drawn down on one side:

"Mary, my love, you will certainly agree that your islanders who do not eat cushags, poor dears, are the funniest people alive as guests."

"Not funnier," I answered, "than the people who laugh at them as hosts."

It was not easy to laugh at that, so to cover Alma's confusion the men turned the talk to their usual topic, horses and dogs, and I heard a great deal about "laying on the hounds," which culminated in a rather vulgar story of how a beater who "wasn't nippy on his pins" had been "peppered from behind," whereupon he had "bellowed like a bull" until "soothed down by a sov."

I cannot say how long the talk would have continued in this manner if old Mrs. Lier, addressing herself to me, had not struck a serious subject.

It was about Alma's dog, which was dead. The poor wheezy spaniel had died in the course of the cruise, though what the cause of its death was nobody knew, unless it had been fretting for its mistress during the period of quarantine which the absurd regulations of government had required on our return from abroad.

The dog having died at sea, I presumed it had been buried there, but no, that seemed to shock the company as an unfeeling supposition. The ship's carpenter had made a coffin for it—a beautiful one of mahogany with a plate-glass inset at the head, and a gilt-lettered inscription below, giving the dog's name, Prue, and its age, three.

In this condition it had been brought ashore, and was now lying in a kind of state in Alma's dressing-room. But to-morrow it was to be buried in the grounds, probably in the glen, to which the company, all dressed in black, were to follow in procession as at a human funeral.

I was choking with anger and horror at the recital of these incredible arrangements, and at the close of it I said in a clear, emphatic voice:

"I must ask you to be good enough not to do that, please."

"Why not, my dear?" said Alma.

"Because I do not wish and cannot permit it," I answered.

There was an awkward pause after this unexpected pronouncement, and when the conversation was resumed my quick ears (which have not always added to my happiness) caught the half-smothered words:

"Getting a bit sidey, isn't she?"

Nevertheless, when I rose to leave the dining-room, Alma wound her arm round my waist, called me her "dear little nun," and carried me off to the hall.

There we sat about the big open fire, and after a while the talk became as free as it often is among fashionable ladies of a certain class.

Mr. Eastcliff's Camilla told a slightly indelicate anecdote of a "dresser" she had had at the theatre, and then another young woman (the same who "adored the men who went to the deuce for a woman") repeated the terms of an advertisement she had seen in a Church newspaper: "A parlourmaid wants a situation in a family where a footman is kept."

The laughter which followed this story was loud enough, but it was redoubled when Alma's mother, from the depths of an arm-chair, said, with her usual solemnity, that she "didn't see nothing to laugh at" in that, and "the pore girl hadn't no such thought as they had."

Again I was choking with indignation, and in order to assert myself once for all I said:

"Ladies, I will ask you to discontinue this kind of conversation. I don't like it."

At last the climax came.

About ten days after Martin left me I received a telegram, which had been put ashore at Southampton, saying, "Good-bye! God bless you!" and next day there came a newspaper containing an account of his last night at Tilbury.

He had given a dinner to a number of his friends, including his old commander and his wife, several other explorers who happened to be in London, a Cabinet Minister, and the proprietor of the journal which had promoted his expedition.

They had dined in the saloon of the "Scotia" (how vividly I remembered it!), finishing up the evening with a dance on deck in the moonlight; and when the time came to break up, Martin had made one of his sentimental little speeches (all heart and not too much grammar), in which he said that in starting out for another siege of the South Pole he "couldn't help thinking, with a bit of a pain under the third button of his double-breasted waistcoat, of the dear ones they were leaving behind, and of the unknown regions whither they were tending where dancing would be forgotten."

I need not say how this moved me, being where I was, in that uncongenial company; but by some mischance I left the paper which contained it on the table in the drawing-room, and on going downstairs after breakfast next morning I found Alma stretched out in a rocking-chair before the fire in the hall, smoking a cigarette and reading the report aloud in a mock heroic tone to a number of the men, including my husband, whose fat body (he was growing corpulent) was shaking with laughter.

It was as much as I could do to control an impulse to jump down and flare out at them, but, being lightly shod, I was standing quietly in their midst before they were aware of my presence.

"Ah," said Alma, with the sweetest and most insincere of her smiles, "we were just enjoying the beautiful account of your friend's last night in England."

"So I see," I said, and, boiling with anger underneath, I quietly took the paper out of her hand between the tips of my thumb and first finger (as if the contamination of her touch had made it unclean) and carried it to the fire and burnt it.

This semed to be the end of all things. The tall Mr. Eastcliff went over to the open door and said:

"Deuced fine day for a motor drive, isn't it?"

That gentleman had hitherto shown no alacrity in establishing the truth of Alma's excuse for the cruise on the ground of his visit to "his friend who had taken a shoot in Skye;" but now he found himself too deeply interested in the Inverness Meeting to remain longer, while the rest of the party bcame so absorbed in the Perth and Ayr races, salmon-fishing on the Tay, and stag-shooting in the deer-forests of Invercauld, that within a week thereafter I had said good-bye to all of them.

All save Alma.

I was returning from the hall after the departure of a group of my guests when Alma followed me to my room and said:

"My dear, sweet girl, I want you to do me the greatest kindness."

She had to take her mother to New York shortly; but as "that dear old dunce" was the worst of all possible sailors, it would be necessary to wait for the largest of all possible steamers, and as the largest steamers sailed from Liverpool, and Ellan was so near to that port, perhaps I would not mind . . . just for a week or two longer. . . .

What *could* I say? What I did say was what I had said before, with equal weakness and indiscretion, but less than equal danger. A word, half a word, and almost before it was spoken, Alma's arms were about my neck and she was calling me her "dearest, sweetest, kindest friend in the world."

My maid Price was present at this interview, and hardly had Alma left the boudoir when she was twitching at my arm and whispering in my ear:

"My lady, my lady, don't you see what the woman wants? She's watching you."

SEVENTY-THIRD CHAPTER

My husband was the next to go.

He made excuse of his Parliamentary duties. He might be three or four weeks away, but meantime Alma would be with me, and in any case I was not the sort of person to feel lonely.

Never having heard before of any devotion to his duty as a peer, I asked if that was all that was taking him to London.

"Perhaps not all," he answered, and then, with a twang of voice and a twitch of feature, he said:

"I'm getting sick of this God-forsaken place, and then . . . to tell you the truth, your own behaviour is beginning to raw me."

With my husband's departure my triumphal course seemed to come to a close. Left alone with Alma, I became as weak and irresolute as before and began to brood upon Price's warning.

My maid had found a fierce delight in my efforts to assert myself as mistress in my husband's house, but now (taking her former advantage) she was for ever harping upon my foolishness in allowing Alma to remain in it.

"She's deceiving you, my lady," said Price. "*Her* waiting for a steamer indeed! Not a bit of her. If your ladyship will not fly out at me again and pack me off bag and baggage, I'll tell you what's she's waiting for."

"What?"

"She's waiting for . . . she thinks . . . she fancies . . . well, to tell you the honest truth, my lady, the bad-minded thing suspects that something is going to happen to your ladyship, and she's just waiting for the chance of telling his lordship."

I began to feel ill. A dim, vague, uneasy presentiment of coming trouble took frequent possession of my mind.

I tried to suppress it. I struggled to strangle it as an ugly monster created by the nervous strain I had been going through, and for a time I succeeded in doing so. I had told Martin that nothing would happen during his absence, and I compelled myself to believe that nothing would or could.

Weeks passed; the weather changed; the golden hue of autumn gave place to a chilly greyness; the sky became sad with winterly clouds; the land became soggy with frequent rains; the trees showed their bare black boughs; the withered leaves drifted along the roads before blustering winds that came up from the sea; the evenings grew long and the mornings dreary; but still Alma, with her mother, remained at Castle Raa.

I began to be afraid of her. Something of the half-hypnotic spell which she had exercised over me when I was a child asserted itself again, but now it seemed to me to be always evil and sometimes almost demoniacal.

I had a feeling that she was watching me day and night. Occasionally, when she thought I was looking down, I caught the vivid gaze of her coal-black eyes looking across at me through her long sable-coloured eyelashes.

Her conversation was as sweet and suave as ever, but I found myself creeping away from her and even shrinking from her touch.

More than once I remembered what Martin in his blunt way had said of her: "I hate that woman; she's like a snake; I want to put my foot on it."

The feeling that I was alone in this great gaunt house with a woman who was waiting and watching to do me a mischief, that she might step into my shoes, was preying upon my health and spirits.

Sometimes I had sensations of faintness and exhaustion for which I could not account. Looking into my glass in the morning, I saw that my nose was becoming pinched, my cheeks thin, and my whole face not merely pale, but grey.

Alma saw these changes in my appearance, and in the over-sweet tones of her succulent voice she constantly offered me her sympathy. I always declined it, protesting that I was perfectly well, but none the less I shrank within myself and became more and more unhappy.

So fierce a strain could not last very long, and the climax came about three weeks after my husband had left for London.

I was rising from breakfast with Alma and her mother when I was suddenly seized with giddiness, and, after staggering for a moment, I fainted right away.

On recovering consciousness I found myself stretched out on the floor with Alma and her mother leaning over me.

Never to the last hour of my life shall I forget the look in Alma's eyes as I opened my own. With her upper lip sucked in and her lower one slightly set forward she was giving her mother a quick side-glance of evil triumph.

I was overwhelmed with confusion. I thought I might have been speaking as I was coming to, mentioning a name perhaps, out of that dim and sacred chamber of the unconscious soul into which God alone should see. I noticed, too, that my bodice had been unhooked at the back so as to leave it loose over my bosom.

As soon as Alma saw that my eyes were open, she put her arm under my head and began to pour out a flood of honeyed words into my ears.

"My dear, sweet darling," she said, "you scared us to death. We must send for a doctor immediately—your own doctor, you know."

I tried to say there was no necessity, but she would not listen.

"Such a seizure may be of no consequence, my love. I trust it isn't. But on the other hand, it may be a serious matter, and it is my duty, dearest, my duty to your husband, to discover the cause of it."

I knew quite well what Alma was thinking of, yet I could not say more without strengthening her suspicions, so I asked for Price, who helped me up to my room, where I sat on the edge of the bed while she gave me brandy and other restoratives.

That was the beginning of the end. I needed no doctor to say what had befallen me. It was something more stupendous for me than the removal of mountains or the stopping of the everlasting coming and going of the sea.

The greatest of the mysteries of womanhood, the most sacred, the most divine, the mighty mystery of a new life had come to me as it comes to other women. Yet how had it come? Like a lowering thunderstorm.

That golden hour of her sex, which ought to be the sweetest and most joyful in a woman's life—the hour when she goes with a proud and swelling heart to the one she loves, the one who loves her, and with her arms about his neck and her face hidden in his breast whispers her great new secret, and he clasps her more fondly than ever to his heart, because another and closer union has bound them together—that golden hour had come to me, and there was none to share it.

O God! O God! How proudly I had been holding up my head! How I had been trampling on the conventions of morality, the canons of law, and even the sacraments of religion, thinking Nature, which had made our hearts what they are, did not mean a woman to be ashamed of her purest instincts!

And now Nature herself had risen up to condemn me, and before long the whole world would be joining in her cry.

If Martin had been there at that moment I do not think I should have cared what people might think or say of a woman in my condition. But he was separated from me by this time by thousands of miles of sea, and was going deeper and deeper every day into the dark Antarctic night.

How weak I felt, how little, how helpless! Never for a moment did I blame Martin. But I was alone with my responsibility, I was still living in my husband's house, and—worst of all—another woman knew my secret.

SEVENTY-FOURTH CHAPTER

Early next day Doctor Conrad came to see me. I thought it significant that he came in my father's big motor-car—a car of great speed and power.

I was in my dressing-gown before the fire in the boudoir, and at the first glance of his cheerful face under his iron-grey head I knew what Alma had said in the letter which had summoned him.

In his soft voice he asked me a few questions, and though I could have wished to conceal the truth I dared not. I noticed that his face brightened at each of my replies, and at the end of them he said:

"There is nothing to be alarmed at. We shall be better than ever by-and-by."

Then in his sweet and delicate way (as if he were saying something that would be very grateful) he told me what I knew already, and I listened with my head down and my face towards the fire.

He must have been disappointed at the sad way I received his news, for he proceeded to talk of my general health, saying the great thing in such a case as mine was to be cheerful, to keep a good heart, and to look hopefully to the future.

"You must have pleasant surroundings and the society of agreeable people—old friends, old schoolfellows, familiar and happy faces."

I said "Yes" and "Yes," knowing only too well how impossible it all was; and then his talk turned on general topics—my father, whose condition made his face very grave, and then his wife, Christian Ann, whose name caused his gentle old eyes to gleam with sunshine.

She had charged him with a message to me.

"Tell her," she had said, "I shall never forget what she did for me in the autumn, and whiles and whiles I'm thanking God for her."

That cut me to the quick, but I was nearly torn to pieces by what came next.

"Christian Ann told me to say too that Sunny Lodge is longing for you. 'She's a great lady now,' said she, 'but maybe great ladies have their troubles same as ourselves, poor things, and if she ever wants to rest her sweet head in a poor woman's bed, Mary O'Neill's little room is always waiting for her.'"

"God bless her!" I said—it was all I *could* say—and then, to my great relief, he talked on other subjects.

The one thing I was afraid of was that he might speak of Martin. Heaven alone, which looks into the deep places of a woman's heart in her hour of sorest trial, knows why I was in such dread that he might do so, but sure I am that if he had mentioned Martin at that moment I should have screamed.

When he rose to go he repeated his warnings.

"You'll remember what I said about being bright and cheerful?"

"I'll try."

"And keeping happy and agreeable faces about you?"

"Ye-s."

Hardly had he left the room when Alma came sweeping into it, full of her warmest and insincerest congratulations.

"There!" she cried, with all the bitter honey of her tongue. "Wasn't I right in sending for the doctor? Such news, too! Oh, happy, happy you! But I must not keep you now, dearest. You'll be just crazy to write to your husband and tell him all about it."

Alma's mother was the next to visit me. The comfortable old soul, redolent of perfume and glittering with diamonds, began by congratulating herself on her perspicacity.

"I knew it," she said. "When I saw as how you were so and so, I said to Alma as I was sure you were that way. 'Impossible,' said Alma, but it's us married women to know, isn't it?"

After that, and some homely counsel out of her own experience—to take my breakfast in bed in future, avoiding tea, &c.,—she told me how fortunate I was to have Alma in the house at such a moment.

"The doctor says you're to be kept bright and cheerful, and she's such a happy heart, is Alma. So crazy about you too! You wouldn't believe it, but she's actually talking of staying with you until the December sailing, at all events."

The prospect of having Alma two months longer, to probe my secret soul as with a red-hot iron, seemed enough to destroy me, but my martyrdom had only begun.

Next day, Aunt Bridget came, and the bright glitter of the usually cold grey eyes behind her gold-rimmed spectacles told me at a glance that her visit was not an unselfish one.

"There now," she said, "you've got to thank me for this. Didn't I give you good advice when I told you to be a little blind? It's the only way with husbands. When Conrad came home with the news I said, 'Betsy, I must get away to the poor girl straight.' To be sure I had enough on my hands already, but I couldn't leave you to strangers, could I?"

Hearing no response to this question, Aunt Bridget went on to say that what was coming would be a bond between me and my husband.

"It always is. It was in my case, anyway. The old colonel didn't behave very well after our marriage, and times and times I was telling myself I had made a rue bargain; but when Betsy came I thought, 'I might have done better, but I might have done worse, and he's the father of my offspring, anyway.'"

Hearing no response to this either, Aunt Bridget went on to talk of Alma and her mother. Was not this the woman I suspected with my husband—the young one with the big eyes and "the quality toss with her?" Then why did I have a person like that about the house?

"If you need bright and cheerful company, what's amiss with your aunt and your first cousin? Some people are selfish, but I thank the saints I don't know what selfishness is. I'm willing to do for you what I did for your poor mother, and *I* can't say more than that, can I?"

I must have made some kind of response, for Aunt Bridget went on to say it might be a sacrifice, but then she wouldn't be sorry to leave the Big House either.

"I'm twenty years there, and now I'm to be a servant to my own stepchild. Dear heart knows if I can bear it much longer. The way that Nessy is carrying on with your father is something shocking. I do believe she'll marry the man some day."

To escape from a painful topic I asked after my father's health.

"Worse and worse, but Conrad's news was like laughing-gas to the man. He would have come with me to-day, but the doctor wouldn't hear of it. He'll come soon though, and meantime he's talking and talking about a great entertainment.''

''Entertainment?''

''To celebrate the forthcoming event, of course, though nobody is to know that except ourselves, it seems. Just a house-warming in honour of your coming home after your marriage—that's all it's to be on the outside, anyway.''

I made some cry of pain, and Aunt Bridget said:

''Oh, I know what you're going to say—why doesn't he wait? I'll tell you why if you'll promise not to whisper a word to any one. Your father is a sick man, my dear. Let him say what he likes when Conrad talks about cancer, he knows Death's hand is over him. And thinking it may fall before your time has come, he wants to take time by the forelock and see a sort of fulfilment of the hope of his life—and you know what that is.''

It was terrible. The position in which I stood towards my father was now so tragic that (wicked as it was) I prayed with all my heart that I might never look upon his face again.

I was compelled to do so. Three days after Aunt Bridget's visit my father came to see me. The day was fine and I was walking on the lawn when his big car came rolling up the drive.

I was shocked to see the change in him. His face was ghastly white, his lips were blue, his massive and powerful head seemed to have sunk into his shoulders, and his limbs were so thin that his clothes seemed to hang on them; but the stern mouth was there still, and so was the masterful lift of the eyebrows.

Coming over to meet me with an uncertain step, he said:

''Old Conrad was for keeping me in bed, but I couldn't take rest without putting a sight on you.''

After that, and some plain speech out of the primitive man he always was and will be (about it's being good for a woman to have children because it saved her from ''losing her stomach'' over imaginary grievances), he led me, with the same half-contemptuous tenderness which he used to show to my mother, back to the house and into the drawing-room.

Alma and her mother were there, the one writing at a desk, the other knitting on the sofa, and they rose as my father entered, but he waved them back to their places.

''Set down, ma'am. Take your seat, mother. I'm only here for a minute to talk to my gel about her great reception."

"Reception?" said Alma.

"Hasn't she told you about it?" he said, and being answered that I had not, he gave a rough outline of his project, whereupon Alma, whose former attitude towards my father had changed to one of flattery and subservience, lifted her hands and cried:

"How splendid! Such an inspiration! Only think, my love, you were to be kept bright and cheerful, and what could be better for that purpose?"

In the torment of my soul I urged one objection after another—it would be expensive, we could not afford it.

"Who asks you to afford it? It's my affair, isn't it?" said my father.

I was unwell, and therefore unable to undertake the hard work of such an entertainment—but that was the worst of excuses, for Alma jumped in with an offer of assistance.

"My dearest child," she said, "you know how happy I shall be to help you. In fact, I'll do all the work and you shall have all the glory."

"There you are, then," cried my father, slapping me on the shoulder, and then, turning to Alma, he told her to set to work without a day's delay.

"Let everything be done correct even if it costs me a bit of money."

"Yes, sir."

"A rael big thing, ma'am, such as nobody has ever seen before."

"Yes indeed, sir."

"Ask all the big people on the island—Nessy MacLeod shall send you a list of them."

"I will, sir."

"That'll do for the present—I guess I must be going now, or old Conrad will be agate of me. So long, gel, so long."

I was silenced, I was helpless, I was ashamed.

I did not know then, what now I know, that, besides the desire of celebrating the forthcoming birth of an heir, my father had another and still more secret object—that of throwing dust in the eyes of his advocates, bankers, and insular councillors, who (having expected him to make money for them by magic) were beginning to whisper that all was not well with his financial schemes.

I did not know then, what now I know, that my father was at that moment the most tragic figure in Ellan except myself, and that, shattered in health and shaken in fortune, he was indulging in this wild extravagance equally to assert his solvency and to gratify his lifelong passion under the very wing of Death.

But oh, my wild woe, my frantic prayers! It was almost as if Satan himself were torturing me.

The one terror of the next few days was that my husband might return home, for I knew that at the first moment of his arrival the whole world of make-believe which my father and Alma were setting up around me would tumble about my head like a pack of cards.

He did not come, but he wrote. After saying that his political duties would keep him in London a little longer, he said:

"I hear that your father is getting you to give a great reception in honour of our home-coming. But why *now,* instead of three months ago? *Do you know the reason?*"

As I read these last words I felt an icy numbness creeping up from my feet to my heart. My position was becoming intolerable. The conviction was being forced upon me that I had no right in my husband's house.

It made no difference that my husband's house was mine also, in the sense that it could not exist without me—I had no right to be there.

It made no difference that my marriage had been no marriage—I had no right to be there.

It made no difference that the man I had married was an utterly bad husband—I had no right to be there.

It made no difference that I was not really an adulterous wife—I had no right to be there.

Meanwhile Price, my maid, but my only real friend in Castle Raa, with the liberty I allowed her, was unconsciously increasing my torture. Every night as she combed out my hair she gave me her opinion of my attitude towards Alma, and one night she said:

"Didn't I tell you she was only watching you, my lady? The nasty-minded thing is making mischief with his lordship. She's writing to him every day. . . . How do I know? Oh, I don't keep my eyes and my ears open downstairs for nothing. You'll have no peace of your life, my lady, until you turn that woman out of the house."

Then in a fit of despair, hardly knowing what I was doing, I covered my face with my hands and said:

"I had better turn myself out instead, perhaps."

The combing of my hair suddenly stopped, and at the next moment I heard Price saying in a voice which seemed to come from a long way off:

"Goodness gracious me! Is it like that, my lady?"

SEVENTY-FIFTH CHAPTER

Alma was as good as her word.

She did everything without consulting me—fixed the date of the reception for a month after the day of my father's visit, and sent out invitations to all "the insular gentry" included in the lists which came from Nessy MacLeod in her stiff and formal handwriting.

These lists came morning after morning, until the invitations issued reached the grand total of five hundred.

As the rooms of the Castle were not large enough to accommodate so many guests, Alma proposed to erect a temporary pavilion. My father agreed, and within a week hundreds of workmen from Blackwater were setting up a vast wooden structure, in the form of the Colosseum, on the headlands beyond the garden where Martin and I had walked together.

While the work went on my father's feverish pride seemed to increase. I heard of messages to Alma saying that on money was to be spared. The reception was to surpass in grandeur any fête ever held in Ellan. Not knowing what high stakes my father was playing for, I was frightened by this extravagance, and from that cause alone I wished to escape from the sight of it.

I could not escape.

I felt sure that Alma hated me with an implacable hatred, and that she was trying to drive me away, thinking that would be the easiest means to gain her own ends. For this reason, among others, the woman in me would not let me fly, so I remained and went through a purgatory of suffering.

Price, too, who had reconciled herself to my revelation, was always urging me to remain, saying:

"Why should you go, my lady? You are your husband's wife, aren't you? Fight it out, I say. Ladies do so every day. Why shouldn't you?"

Before long the whole island seemed to be astir about our reception. Every day the insular newspapers devoted columns to the event, giving elaborate accounts of what limitless wealth could accomplish for a single night's entertainment. In these descriptions there was much eulogy of my father as "the uncrowned king of Ellan," as well as praise of Alma, who was "displaying such daring originality," but little or no mention of myself.

Nevertheless everybody seemed to understand the inner meaning of the forthcoming reception, and in the primitive candour of our insular manners some of the visits I received were painfully embarrassing.

One of the first to come was my father's advocate, Mr. Curphy, who smiled his usual bland smile and combed his long beard while he thanked me for acting on his advice not to allow a fit of pique to break up a marriage which was so suitable from points of property and position.

"How happy your father must be to see the fulfilment of his hopes," he said. "Just when his health is failing him, too! How good! How gratifying!"

The next to come was the Bishop, who, smooth and suave as ever, congratulated me on putting aside all thoughts of divorce, so that the object of my marriage might be fulfilled and a good Catholic become the heir of Castle Raa.

More delicate, but also more distressing, was a letter from Father Dan, saying he had been forbidden my husband's house and therefore could not visit me, but having heard an angel's whisper of the sweet joy that was coming to me, he prayed the Lord and His Holy Mother to carry me safely through.

"I have said a rosary for you every day since you were here, my dear child, that you might be saved from a great temptation. And now I know you have been, and the sacrament of your holy marriage has fulfilled its mission, as I always knew it would. So God bless you, my daughter, and keep you pure and fit for eternal union with that blessed saint, your mother, whom the Lord has made His own."

More than ever after this letter I felt that I must fly from my husband's house, but, thinking of Alma, my wounded pride, my outraged vanity (as I say, the *woman* in me), would not let me go.

Three weeks passed.

The pavilion had been built and was being hung with gaily painted bannerets to give the effect of the Colosseum as seen at sunset. A covered corridor connecting the theatre with the house was being lined with immense hydrangeas and lit from the roof by lamps that resembled stars.

A few days before the day fixed for the event Alma, who had been too much occupied to see me every day in the boudoir to which I confined myself, came up to give me my instructions.

The entertainment was to begin at ten o'clock. I was to be dressed as Cleopatra and to receive my guests in the drawing-room. At the sound of a fanfare of trumpets I was to go into the theatre preceded by a line of pages, and accompanied by my husband. After we had taken our places in a private box a great ballet, brought specially from a London music-hall, was to give a performance lasting until midnight. Then there was to be a cotillon, led by Alma herself with my husband, and after supper the dancing was to be resumed and kept up until sunrise, when a basketful of butterflies and doves (sent from the South of France) were to be liberated from cages, and to rise in a multicoloured cloud through the sunlit space.

I was sick and ashamed when I thought of this vain and gaudy scene and the object which I supposed it was intended to serve.

The end of it all was that I wrote to my father, concealing the real cause of my suffering, but telling him he could not possibly be aware of what was being done in his name and with his money, and begging him to put an end to the entertainment altogether.

The only answer I received was a visit from Nessy MacLeod. I can see her still as she came into my room, the tall gaunt figure with red hair and irregular features.

"Cousin Mary," she said, seating herself stiffly on the only stiff-backed chair, and speaking in an impassive tone, "your letter has been received, but your father has not seen it, his health being such as makes it highly undesirable that he should be disturbed by unnecessary worries."

I answered with some warmth that my letter had not been unnecessary, but urgent and important, and if she persisted in withholding it from my father I should deliver it myself.

"Cousin Mary," said Nessy, "I know perfectly what your letter is, having opened and read it, and while I am as little as yourself in sympathy with what is going on here, I happen to know that your father has set his heart on this entertainment, and therefore I do not choose that it shall be put off.''

I replied hotly that in opening my letter to my father she had taken an unwarrantable liberty, and then (losing myself a little) I asked her by what right did she, who had entered my father's house as a dependent, dare to keep his daughter's letter from him.

''Cousin Mary,'' said Nessy, in the same impassive tone, ''you were always self-willed, selfish, and most insulting as a child, and I am sorry to see that neither marriage nor education at a convent has chastened your ungovernable temper. But I have told you that I do not choose that you shall injure your father's health by disturbing his plans, and you shall certainly not do so.''

''Then take care,'' I answered, ''that in protecting my father's health you do not destroy it altogether.''

In spite of her cold and savourless nature, she understood my meaning, for after a moment of silence she said:

''Cousin Mary, you may do exactly as you please. Your conduct in the future, whatever it may be, will be no affair of mine, and I shall not consider that I am in any way responsible for it.''

At last I began to receive anonymous letters. They came from various parts of Ellan and appeared to be in different handwritings. Some of them advised me to fly from the island, and others enclosed a list of steamers' sailings.

Only a woman who has been the victim of this species of cowardly torture can have any idea of the shame of it, and again and again I asked myself if I ought not to escape from my husband's house before he returned.

But Price seemed to find a secret joy in the anonymous letters, saying she believed she knew the source of them; and one evening towards the end, she came running into my room with a shawl over her head, a look of triumph in her face, and an unopened letter in her hand.

''There!'' she said. ''It's all up with Madame now. You've got the game in your own hands, my lady, and can send them all packing.''

The letter was addressed to my husband in London. Price had seized the arm of Alma's maid in the act of posting it, and under threat of the law (not to speak of instant personal chastisement) the girl had confessed that both this letter and others had been written by our housekeeper under the inspiration of her mistress.

Without any compunction Price broke the seal of the intercepted letter and read it aloud to me. It was a shocking thing, accusing me with Martin, and taunting my husband with the falseness of the forthcoming entertainment.

Feeling too degraded to speak, I took the letter in silence out of my maid's hands, and while I was in the act of locking it away in a drawer Alma came up with a telegram from my husband, saying he was leaving London by the early train the following morning and would arrive at Blackwater at half-past three in the afternoon.

"Dear old Jimmy!" she said, "what a surprise you have in store for him! But of course you've told him already, haven't you? . . . No? Ah, I see, you've been saving it all up to tell him face to face. Oh, happy, happy you!"

It was too late to leave now. The hour of my trial had come. There was no possibility of escape. It was just as if Satan had been holding me in the net of my sin, so that I could not fly away.

At three o'clock next day (which was the day before the day fixed for the reception) I heard the motor-car going off to meet my husband at Blackwater. At four o'clock I heard it return. A few minutes afterwards I heard my husband's voice in the hall. I thought he would come up to me directly, but he did not do so, and I did not attempt to go down. When, after a while, I asked what had become of him, I was told that he was in the library with Alma, and that they were alone.

Two hours passed.

To justify and fortify myself I thought how badly my husband had behaved to me. I remembered that he had married me from the most mercenary motives; that he had paid off his mistress with the money that came through me; that he had killed by cruelty the efforts I had made to love him; that he had humiliated me by gross infidelities committed on my honeymoon. I recalled the scenes in Rome, the scenes in Paris, and the insults I had received under my own roof.

It was all in vain. Whether God means it that the woman's fault in breaking her marriage vows (whatever her sufferings and excuse) shall be greater than that of the man I do not know. I only know that I was trembling like a prisoner before her judge when, being dressed for dinner and waiting for the sound of the bell, I heard my husband's footsteps approach my door.

I was standing by the fire at that moment, and I held on to the mantelpiece as my husband came into the room.

SEVENTY-SIXTH CHAPTER

He was very pale. The look of hardness, almost of brutality, which pierced his manner at normal moments had deepened, and I could see at a glance that he was nervous. His monocle dropped of itself from his slow grey eyes, and the white fat fingers which replaced it trembled.

Without shaking hands or offering any other sort of salutation he plunged immediately into the matter that was uppermost in his mind.

"I am still at a loss to account for this affair of your father's," he said. "Of course I know what it is supposed to be—a reception in honour of our home-coming. That explanation may or may not be sufficient for these stupid islanders, but it's rather too thin for me. Can you tell me what your father means by it?"

I knew he knew what my father meant, so I said, trembling like a sheep that walks up to a barking dog:

"Hadn't you better ask that question of my father himself?"

"Perhaps I should if he were here, but he isn't, so I ask you. Your father is a strange man. There's no knowing what crude things he will not do to gratify his primitive instincts. But he does not spend five or ten thousand pounds for nothing. He isn't a fool exactly."

"Thank you," I said. I could not help it. It was forced out of me.

My husband flinched and looked at me. Then the bully in him, which always lay underneath, came uppermost.

"Look here, Mary," he said. "I came for an explanation and I intend to have one. Your father may give this affair what gloss he pleases, but you must know as well as I do what rumour and report are saying, so we might as well speak plainly. Is it the fact that the doctor has made certain statements about your own condition, and that your father is giving this entertainment because . . . well, because he is expecting an heir?"

To my husband's astonishment I answered:

"Yes."

"So you admit it? Then perhaps you'll be good enough to tell me how that condition came about?"

Knowing he needed no explanation, I made no answer.

"Can't you speak?" he said.

But still I remained silent.

"You know what our relations have been since our marriage, so I ask you again how does that condition come about?"

I was now trembling more than ever, but a kind of forced courage came to me and I said:

"Why do you ask? You seem to know already."

"I know what anonymous letters have told me, if that's what you mean. But I'm your husband and have a right to know from *you*. How does your condition come about, I ask you?"

I cannot say what impulse moved me at that moment unless it was the desire to make a clean breast and an end of everything, but, stepping to my desk, I took out of a drawer the letter which Price had intercepted and threw it on the table.

He took it up and read it, with the air of one to whom the contents were not news, and then asked how I came by it.

"It was taken out of the hands of a woman who was in the act of posting it," I said. "She confessed that it was one of a number of such letters which had been inspired, if not written, by your friend Alma."

"My friend Alma!"

"Yes, your friend Alma."

His face assumed a frightful expression and he said:

"So that's how it is to be, is it? In spite of the admission you have just made you wish to imply that this" (holding out the letter) "is a trumped-up affair, and that Alma is at the bottom of it. You're going to brazen it out, are you, and shelter your condition under your position as a married woman?"

I was so taken by surprise by this infamous suggestion that I could not speak to deny it, and my husband went on to say:

"But it doesn't matter a rush to me who is at the bottom of the accusation contained in this letter. There's only one thing of any consequence—is it true?"

My head was reeling, my eyes were dim, my palms were moist, I felt as if I were throwing myself over a precipice, but I answered:

"It is perfectly true."

I think that was the last thing he expected. After a moment he said:

"Then you have broken your marriage vows—is that it?"

"Yes, if you call it so."

"Call it so? Call it so? Good heavens, what do *you* call it?"

I did not reply, and after another moment he said:

"But perhaps you wish me to understand that this man whom I was so foolish as to invite to my house abused my hospitality and betrayed my wife. Is that what you mean?"

"No," I said. "He observed the laws of hospitality much better than you did, and if I am betrayed I betrayed myself."

I shall never forget the look with which my husband received this confession. He drew himself up with the air of an injured man and said:

"What? You mean that you yourself . . . deliberately . . . Good God!"

He stopped for a moment and then said with a rush:

"I suppose you've not forgotten what happened at the time of our marriage . . . your resistance and the ridiculous compact I submitted to? Why did I submit? Because I thought your innocence, your convent-bred ideas, and your ignorance of the first conditions of matrimony. . . . But I've been fooled, for you now tell me . . . after all my complacency . . . that you have deliberately . . . In the name of God do you know what you are? There's only one name for a woman who does what you've done. Do you want me to tell you what that name is?"

I was quivering with shame, but my mind, which was going at lightning speed, was thinking of London, of Cairo, of Rome, and of Paris.

"Why don't you speak?" he cried, lifting his voice in his rage. "Don't you understand what a letter like this is calling you?"

My heart choked. But the thought that came to me—that, bad as his own life had been, he considered he had a right to treat me in this way because he was a man and I was a woman—brought strength out of my weakness, so that when he went on to curse my Church and my religion, saying this was all that had come of "the mummery of my masses," I fired up for a moment and said:

"You can spare yourself these blasphemies. If I have done wrong, it is I, and not my Church, that is to blame for it.''

''*If* you have done wrong!'' he cried. ''Damn it, have you lost all sense of a woman's duty to her husband? While you have been married to me and I have been fool enough not to claim you as a wife because I thought you were only fit company for the saints and angels, you have been prostituting yourself to this blusterer, this . . . ''

''That is a lie,'' I said, stepping up to him in the middle of the floor. ''It's true that I am married to you, but *he* is my real husband and you . . . you are nothing to me at all.''

My husband stood for a moment with his mouth agape. Then he began to laugh—loudly, derisively, mockingly.

''Nothing to you, am I? You don't mind bearing my name, though, and when your time comes you'll expect it to cover your disgrace.''

His face had become shockingly distorted. He was quivering with fury.

''That's not the worst, either,'' he cried. ''It's not enough that you should tell me to my face that somebody else is your real husband, but you must shunt your spurious offspring into my house. Isn't that what it all comes to . . . all this damnable fuss of your father's . . . that you are going to palm off on me and my name and family your own and this man's . . . bastard?''

And with the last word, in the drunkenness of his rage, he lifted his arm and struck me with the back of his hand across the cheek.

The physical shock was fearful, but the moral infamy was a hundred-fold worse. I can truly say that not alone for myself did I suffer. When my mind, still going at lightning speed, thought of Martin, who loved me so tenderly, I felt crushed by my husband's blow to the lowest depths of shame.

I must have screamed, though I did not know it, for at the next moment Price was in the room and I saw that the housekeeper (drawn perhaps, as before, by my husband's loud voice) was on the landing outside the door. But even that did not serve to restrain him.

''No matter,'' he said. ''After what has passed you may not enjoy to-morrow's ceremony. But you shall go through it! By heaven, you shall! And when it is over, I shall have something to say to your father.''

And with that he swung out of the room and went lunging down the stairs.

I was still standing in the middle of the floor, with the blow from my husband's hand tingling on my cheek, when Price, after clashing the door in the face of the housekeeper, said, with her black eyes ablaze:

"Well, if ever I wanted to be a man before to-day!"

News of the scene went like wildfire through the house, and Alma's mother came to comfort me. In her crude and blundering way she told me of a similar insult she had suffered at the hands of the "bad Lord Raa," and how it had been the real reason of her going to America.

"Us married ladies have much to put up with. But cheer up, dearie. I guess you'll have gotten over it by to-morrow morning."

When she was gone I sat down before the fire. I did not cry. I felt as if I had reached a depth of suffering that was a thousand fathoms too deep for tears. I do not think I wept again for many months afterwards, and then it was a great joy, not a great grief, that brought me a burst of blessed tears.

But I could hear my dear good Price crying behind me, and when I said:

"Now you see for yourself that I cannot remain in this house any longer," she answered, in a low voice:

"Yes, my lady."

"I must go at once—to-night if possible."

"You shall. Leave everything to me, my lady."

SEVENTY-SEVENTH CHAPTER

The bell rang, but of course I did not go down to dinner.

As soon as Price had gone off to make the necessary arrangements I turned the key in the lock of my door, removed my evening gown, and began to dress for my flight.

My brain was numb, but I did my best to confront the new situation that was before me.

Hitherto I had been occupied with the problem of whether I should or should not leave my husband's house; now I had to settle the question of where I was to go to.

I dared not think of home, for (Nessy MacLeod and Aunt Bridget apart) the house of my father was the last place I could fly to at a moment when I was making dust and ashes of his lifelong expectations.

Neither dared I think of Sunny Lodge, although I remembered, with a tug of tenderness, Christian Ann's last message about Mary O'Neill's little room that was always waiting for me—for I thought of how I had broken my pledge to her.

The only place I could think of was that which Martin had mentioned when he wished to carry me away—London. In the mighty world of London I might hide myself from observation and wait until Martin returned from his expedition.

"Yes, yes, London," I told myself in my breathless excitement, little knowing what London meant.

I began to select the clothes I was to carry with me and to wear on my journey. They must be plain, for I had to escape from a house in which unfriendly eyes would be watching me. They must be durable, for during my time of waiting I expected to be poor.

I hunted out some of the quaker-like costumes which had been made for me before my marriage; and when I had put them on I saw that they made a certain deduction from my appearance, but that did not matter to me now—the only eyes I wished to look well in being down in the Antarctic seas.

Then I tried to think of practical matters—how I was to live in London and how, in particular, I was to meet the situation that was before me. Surely never did a more helpless innocent confront such a serious problem. I was a woman, and for more than a year I had been a wife, but I had no more experience of the hard facts of material existence than a child.

I thought first of the bank-book which my father had sent me with authority to draw on his account. But it was then nine o'clock, the banks were closed for the day, and I knew enough of the world to see that if I attempted to cash a cheque in the morning my whereabouts would be traced. That must never happen, I must hide myself from everybody; therefore my bank-book was useless.

"Quite useless," I thought, throwing it aside like so much waste paper.

I thought next of my jewels. But there I encountered a similar difficulty. The jewels which were really mine, having been bought by myself, had been gambled away by my husband at Monte Carlo. What remained were the family jewels which had come to me as Lady Raa; but that was a name I was never more to bear, a person I was never more to think about, so I could not permit myself to take anything that belonged to her.

The only thing left to me was my money. I had always kept a good deal of it about me, although the only use I had had for it was to put it in the plate at church, and to scatter it with foolish prodigality to the boys who tossed somersaults behind the carriage in the road.

Now I found it all over my room—in my purse, in various drawers, and on the toilet-tray under my dressing-glass. Gathered together it counted up to twenty-eight pounds. I owed four pounds to Price, and having set them aside, I saw that I had twenty-four pounds left in notes, gold, and silver.

Being in the literal and unconventional sense utterly ignorant of the value of sixpence, I thought this a great sum, amply sufficient for all my needs, or at least until I secured employment—for I had from the first some vague idea of earning my own living.

''Martin would like that,'' I told myself, lifting my head with a thrill of pride.

Then I began to gather up the treasures which were inexpressibly more dear to me than all my other possessions.

One of them was a little miniature of my mother which Father Dan had given me for a wedding-present when (as I know now) he would rather have parted with his heart's blood.

Another was a pearl rosary which the Reverend Mother had dropped over my arm the last time she kissed me on the forehead; and the last was my Martin's misspelt love-letter, which was more precious to me than rubies.

Not for worlds, I thought, would I leave these behind me, or ever part with them under any circumstances.

Several times while I was busy with such preparations, growing more and more nervous every moment, Price came on tip-toe and tapped softly at my door.

Once it was to bring me some food and to tell me, with many winks (for the good soul herself was trembling with excitement), that everything was ''as right as ninepence.'' I should get away without difficulty in a couple of hours, and until to-morrow morning nobody would be a penny the wiser.

Fortunately it was Thursday, when a combined passenger and cargo steamer sailed to Liverpool. Of course the motor-car would not be available to take me to the pier, but Tommy the Mate, who had a stiff cart in which he took his surplus products to market, would be waiting for me at eleven o'clock by the gate to the high road.

The people downstairs, meaning my husband and Alma and her mother, were going off to the pavilion (where hundreds of decorators were to work late and the orchestra and ballet were to have a rehearsal), and they had been heard to say that they would not be back until "way round about midnight."

"But the servants?" I asked.

"They're going too, bless them," said Price. "So eat your dinner in peace, my lady, and don't worry about a thing until I come back to fetch you."

Another hour passed. I was in a fever of apprehension. I felt like a prisoner who was about to escape from a dungeon.

A shrill wind was coming up from the sea and whistling about the house. I could hear the hammering of the workmen in the pavilion as well as the music of the orchestra practising their scores.

A few minutes before eleven Price returned, carrying one of the smaller of the travelling-trunks I had taken to Cairo. I noticed that it bore no name and no initials.

"It's all right," she said. "They've gone off, every mother's son and daughter of them—all except the housekeeper, and I've caught her out, the cat!"

That lynx-eyed person had begun to suspect. She had seen Tommy harnessing his horse and had not been satisfied with his explanation—that he was taking tomatoes to Blackwater to be sent off by the Liverpool steamer.

So to watch events, without seeming to watch them, the housekeeper (when the other servants had gone off to the rehearsal) had stolen upstairs to her room in the West tower overlooking the back courtyard.

But Price had been more than a match for her. Creeping up behind, she had locked the door of the top landing, and now the "little cat" might scream her head off through the window, and (over the noises of the wind and the workmen) it would be only like "tom" shrieking on the tiles.

"We must be quick, though," said Price, tumbling into my travelling-trunk as many of my clothes as it would hold.

When it was full and locked and corded she said:

"Wait," and stepped out on the landing to listen.

After a moment she returned saying:

"Not a sound! Now for it, my lady."

And then, tying her handkerchief over her head to keep down her hair in the wind, she picked up the trunk in her arms and crept out of the room on tiptoe.

The moment had come to go, yet, eager as I had been all evening to escape from my husband's house, I could scarcely tear myself away, for I was feeling a little of that regret which comes to us all when we are doing something for the last time.

Passing through the boudoir this feeling took complete possession of me. Only a few hours before it had been the scene of my deepest degradation, but many a time before it had been the place of my greatest happiness.

"You are my wife. I am your real husband. No matter where you are or what they do with you, you are mine and always will be."

Half-closing the door, I took a last look round—at the piano, the desk, the table, the fireplace, all the simple things associated with my dearest memories. So strong was the yearning of my own soul that I felt as if the soul of Martin were in the room with me at that moment.

I believe it was.

"Quick, my lady, or you'll lose your steamer," whispered Price, and then we crossed the landing (which was creaking again) and crept noiselessly down a back staircase.

We were near the bottom when I was startled by a loud knocking, which seemed to come from a distant part of the house. My heart temporarily stopped its beating, but Price only laughed and whispered:

"There she is! We've fairly caught her out, the cat."

At the next moment Price opened an outer door, and after we had passed through she closed and locked it behind us.

We were then in the courtyard behind the house, stumbling in the blinding darkness over cobble-stones.

"Keep close to me, my lady," said Price.

After a few moments we reached the drive. I think I was more nervous than I had ever been before. I heard the withered leaves behind me rustling along the ground before the wind from the sea, and thought they were the footsteps of people pursuing us. I heard the hammering of the workmen and the music of the orchestra, and thought they were voices screaming to us to come back.

Price, who was forging ahead, carried the trunk in her arms as if it had been a child, but every few minutes she waited for me to come up to her, and encouraged me when I stumbled in the darkness.

"Only a little further, my lady," she said, and I did my best to struggle on.

We reached the gate to the high road at last. Tommy the

Mate was there with his stiff cart, and Price, who was breathless after her great exertion, tumbled my trunk over the tail-board.

The time had come to part from her, and, remembering how faithful and true she had been to me, I hardly knew what to say. I told her I had left her wages in an envelope on the dressing-table, and then I stammered something about being too poor to make her a present to remember me by.

"It doesn't need a present to help me to remember a good mistress, my lady," she said.

"God bless you for being so good to me," I answered, and then I kissed her.

"I'll remember you by that, though," she said, and she began to cry.

I climbed over the wheel of the stiff cart and seated myself on my trunk, and then Tommy, who had been sitting on the front-board with his feet on the outer shaft, whipped up his horse and we started away.

During the next half-hour the springless cart bobbed along the dark road at its slow monotonous pace. Tommy never once looked round or spoke except to his horse, but I understood my old friend perfectly.

I was in a fever of anxiety lest I should be overtaken and carried back. Again and again I looked behind. At one moment, when a big motor-car, with its two great white eyes, came rolling up after us, my stormy heart stood still. But it was not my husband's car, and in a little while its red tail-light disappeared in the darkness ahead.

We reached Blackwater in time for the midnight steamer and drew up at the landward end of the pier. It was cold; the salt wind from the sea was very chill. Men who looked like commercial travellers were hurrying along with their coat-collars turned up, and porters with heavy trunks on their shoulders were striving to keep pace with them.

I gave my own trunk to a porter who came up to the cart, and then turned to Tommy to say good-bye. The old man had got down from the shaft and was smoothing his smoking horse, and snuffling as if he had caught a cold.

"Good-bye, Tommy," I said—and then something more which I do not wish to write down.

"Good-bye, lil missie," he answered (that cut me deep), "I never believed ould Tom Dug would live to see ye laving home like this. . . . . But wait! Only wait till himself is after coming back, and I'll go bail it'll be the divil sit up for some of them."

SEVENTY-EIGHTH CHAPTER

It was very dark. No more than three or four lamps on the pier were burning, but nevertheless I was afraid that the pier-master would recognise me.

I thought he did so as I approached the gangway to the saloon, for he said:

"Private cabin on main deck aft."

Nervous as I was, I had just enough presence of mind to say "Steerage, please," which threw him off the scent entirely, so that he cried, in quite a different voice:

"Steerage passengers forward."

I found my way to the steerage end of the steamer; and in order to escape observation from the few persons on the pier I went down to the steerage cabin, which was a little triangular place in the bow, with an open stove in the middle of the floor and a bleary oil-lamp swinging from a rafter overhead.

The porter found me there, and in my foolish ignorance of the value of money I gave him half a crown for his trouble. He first looked at the coin, then tested it between his teeth, then spat on it, and finally went off chuckling.

The first and second bells rang. I grudged every moment of delay before the steamer sailed, for I still felt like a prisoner who was running away and might even yet be brought back.

Seating myself in the darkest corner of the cabin, I waited and watched. There were only two other steerage passengers and they were women. Judging by their conversation I concluded that they were cooks from lodging-houses on "the front," returning after a long season to their homes in Liverpool. Both were very tired, and they were spreading their blankets on the bare bunks so as to settle themselves for the night.

At last the third bell rang. I heard the engine whistle, the funnel belch out its smoke, the hawsers being thrown off, the gangways being taken in, and then, looking through the port-hole, I saw the grey pier gliding behind us.

After a few moments, with a feeling of safety and a sense of danger passed, I went up on deck. But oh, how little I knew what bitter pain I was putting myself to!

We were just then swinging round the lighthouse which stands on the south-east headland of the bay, and the flash of its revolving light in my face as I reached the top of the cabin stairs brought back the memory of the joyous and tumultuous scenes of Martin's last departure.

That, coupled and contrasted with the circumstances of my own flight, stealthily, shamefully, and in the dead of night, gave me a pang that was almost more than I could bear.

But my cup was not yet full. A few minutes afterwards we sailed in the dark past the two headlands of Port Raa, and, looking up, I saw the lights in the windows of my husband's house, and the glow over the glass roof of the pavilion.

What would happen there to-morrow morning when it was discovered that I was gone? What would happen to-morrow night when my father arrived, ignorant of my flight, as I felt sure the malice of my husband would keep him?

Little as I knew then of my father's real motives in giving that bizarre and rather vulgar entertainment, I thought I saw and heard everything that would occur.

I saw the dazzling spectacle, I saw the five hundred guests, I saw Alma and my husband, and above all I saw my father, the old man stricken with mortal maladies, the wounded lion whom the shadow of death itself could not subdue, degraded to the dust in his hour of pride by the act of his own child.

I heard his shouts of rage, his cries of fury, his imprecations on me as one who should never touch a farthing of his fortune. And then I heard the whispering of his ''friends,'' who were telling the ''true story'' of my disappearance, the tale of my ''treacheries'' to my husband—just as if Satan had willed it that the only result of the foolish fête on which my father had wasted his wealth like water should be the publication of my shame.

But the bitterest part of my experience was still to come.

In a few minutes we sailed past the headlands of Port Raa, the lights of my husband's house shot out of view like meteors on a murky night, and the steamer turned her head to the open sea.

I was standing by a rope which crossed the bow and holding on to it to save myself from falling, for, being alone with Nature at last, I was seeing my flight for the first time in full light.

I was telling myself that as surely as my flight became known Martin's name would be linked with mine, and the honour that was dearer to me than my own would be buried in disgrace.

O God! O God! Why should Nature be so hard and cruel to a woman? Why should it be permitted that, having done no worse than obey the purest impulses of my heart, the iron law of my sex should rise up to condemn both me and the one who was dearer to my soul than life itself?

I hardly know how long I stood there, holding on to that rope. There was no sound now except the tread of a sailor in his heavy boots, an inarticulate call from the bridge, an answering shout from the wheel, the rattling of the wind in the rigging, the throbbing of the engine in the bowels of the ship, and the monotonous wash of the waves against her side.

Oh, how little I felt, how weak, how helpless!

I looked up towards the sky, but there seemed to be no sky, no moon, and no stars, only a vaporous blackness that came down and closed about me.

I looked out to the sea, but there seemed to be no sea, only a hissing splash of green spray where the steamer's forward light fell on the water which her bow was pitching up, and beyond that nothing but a threatening and thundering void.

I did not weep, but I felt as other women had felt before me, as other women have felt since, as women must always feel after they have sinned against the world and the world's law, that there was nothing before me but the blackness of night.

"Out of the depths I cry unto thee, O Lord. Lord, hear my cry."

But all at once a blessed thought came to me. We were travelling eastward, and dark as the night was now, in a few hours the day would dawn, the sun would shine in our faces and the sky would smile over our heads!

It would be like that with me. Martin would come back. I was only going to meet him. It was dark midnight with me now, but I was sailing into the sunrise!

Perhaps I was like a child, but I think that comforted me.

At all events I went down to the little triangular cabin with a cheerful heart, forgetting that I was a runaway, a homeless wanderer, an outcast, with nothing before me but the wilderness of London where I should be friendless and alone.

The fire had gone out by this time, the oil-lamp was swinging to the motion of the ship, the timbers were creaking, and the Liverpool women were asleep.

SEVENTY-NINTH CHAPTER

At eight o'clock next morning I was in the train leaving Liverpool for London.

I had selected a second-class compartment labelled "For Ladies," and my only travelling companion was a tall fair woman, in a seal-skin coat and a very large black hat. She had filled the carriage with the warm odour of eau-de-Cologne and the racks on both sides with her luggage, which chiefly consisted of ladies' hat boxes of various shapes and sizes.

Hardly had we started when I realised that she was a very loquacious and expansive person.

Was I going all the way? Yes? Did I live in Liverpool? No? In London perhaps? No? Probably I lived in the country? Yes? That was charming, the country being so lovely.

I saw in a moment that if my flight was to be carried out to any purpose I should have to conceal my identity; but how to do so I did not know, my conscience never before having had to accuse me of deliberate untruth.

Accident helped me. My companion asked me what was my husband's profession, and being now accustomed to think of Martin as my real husband, I answered that he was a commander.

"You mean the commander of a ship?"

"Yes."

"Ah, yes, you've been staying in Liverpool to see him off on a voyage. How sweet! Just what I should do myself if my husband were a sailor."

Then followed a further battery of perplexing questions.

Had my husband gone on a long voyage? Yes? Where to? The South. Did I mean India, Australia, New Zealand? Yes, and still farther.

"Ah, I see," she said again. "He's probably the captain of a tramp steamer, and will go from port to port as long as he can find a cargo."

Hardly understanding what my companion meant by this, I half agreed to it, and then followed a volley of more personal inquiries.

I was young to be married, wasn't I? Probably I hadn't been married very long, had I? And not having settled myself in a home perhaps I was going up to London to wait for my husband? Yes? How wise—town being so much more cheerful than the country.

"Any friends there?"

"No."

"None whatever?"

"None whatever."

"But won't you be lonely by yourself in London?"

"A little lonely perhaps."

Being satisfied that she had found out everything about me, my travelling companion (probably from the mere love of talking) told me something about herself.

She was a fashionable milliner and had a shop in the West End of London. Occasionally she made personal visits to the provinces to take orders from the leading shopkeepers, but during the season she found it more profitable to remain in town, where her connection was large, among people who could pay the highest prices.

By this time we had reached Crewe, and as there was some delay in getting into the station, my travelling companion put her head out of the window to inquire the cause. She was told that a night train from Scotland was in front of us, and we should have to be coupled on to it before we could proceed to London.

This threw her into the wildest state of excitement.

"I see what it is," she said. "The shooting season is over and the society people are coming down from the moors. I know lots and lots of them. They are my best customers—the gentlemen at all events."

"The gentlemen?"

"Why, yes," she said with a little laugh.

After some shunting our Liverpool carriages were coupled to the Scotch train and run into the station, where a number of gentlemen in knickerbockers and cloth caps were strolling about the platform.

My companion seemed to know them all, and gave them their names, generally their Christian names, and often their familiar ones.

Suddenly I had a shock. A tall man, whose figure I recognised, passed close by our carriage, and I had only time to conceal myself from observation behind the curtain of the window.

"Helloa!" cried my companion. "There's Teddy Eastcliff. He married Camilla, the Russian dancer. They first met in my shop I may tell you."

I was feeling hot and cold by turns, but a thick veil must have hidden my confusion, for after we left Crewe my companion, becoming still more confidential, talked for a long time about her aristocratic customers, and I caught a glimpse of a life that was on the verge of a kind of fashionable Bohemia.

More than once I recognised my husband's friends among the number of her clients, and trembling lest my husband himself should become a subject of discussion, I made the excuse of a headache to close my eyes and be silent.

My companion thereupon slept, very soundly and rather audibly, from Rugby to Willesden, where, awakening with a start while the tickets were being collected, she first powdered her face by her fashion-glass and then interested herself afresh in my affairs.

"Did you say, my dear, that you have no friends in London?"

I repeated that I had none.

"Then you will go to an hotel, I suppose?"

I answered that I should have to look for something less expensive.

"In that case," she said, "I think I know something that will suit you exactly."

It was a quiet boarding establishment in Bloomsbury—comfortable house, reasonable terms, and, above all, perfectly respectable. In fact, it was kept by her own sister, and if I liked she would take me along in her cab and drop me at the door. Should she?

Looking back at that moment I cannot but wonder that after what I had heard I did not fear discovery. But during the silence of the last hour I had been feeling more than ever weak and helpless, so that when my companion offered me a shelter in that great, noisy, bewildering city in which I had intended to hide myself, but now feared I might be submerged and lost, with a willing if not a cheerful heart I accepted.

Half an hour afterwards our cab drew up in a street off Russell Square at a rather grimy-looking house which stood at the corner of another and smaller square that was shut off by an iron railing.

The door was opened by a young waiter of sixteen or seventeen years, who was wearing a greasy dress-suit and a soiled shirt front.

My companion pushed into the hall, I followed her, and almost at the same moment a still larger and perhaps grosser woman than my friend, with the same features and complexion, came out of a room to the left with a serviette in her hand.

"Sophie!"

"Jane!" cried my companion, and pointing to me she said: "I've brought you a new boarder."

Then followed a rapid account of where she had met me, who and what I was, and why I had come up to London.

"I've promised you'll take her in and not charge her too much, you know."

"Why, no, certainly not," said the sister.

At the next moment the boy waiter was bringing my trunk into the house on his shoulder and my travelling companion was bidding me good-bye and saying she would look me up later.

When the door was closed I found the house full of the smell of hot food, chiefly roast beef and green vegetables, and I could hear the clink of knives and forks and the clatter of dishes in the room the landlady had come from.

"You'd like to go up to your bedroom at once, wouldn't you?" she said.

We went up two flights of stairs covered with rather dirty druggeting, along a corridor that had a thin strip of linoleum, and finally up a third flight that was bare to the boards, until we came to a room which seemed to be at the top of the house and situated in its remotest corner.

It was a very small apartment, hardly larger than the room over the hall at home in which Aunt Bridget had made me sleep when I was a child, and it was nearly as cold and cheerless.

The wall-paper, which had once been a flowery pink, was now pale and patternless; the Venetian blind over the window (which looked out on the smaller square) had lost one of its cords and hung at an irregular angle; there was a mirror over the mantelpiece with the silvering much mottled, and a leather-covered easy chair whereof the spring was broken and the seat heavily indented.

"I dare say this will do for the present," said my landlady, and though my heart was in my mouth I compelled myself to agree.

"My terms, including meals and all extras, will be a pound a week,'' she added, and to that also, with a lump in my throat I assented, whereupon my landlady left me, saying luncheon was on and I could come downstairs when I was ready.

A talkative cockney chambermaid, with a good little face, brought me a fat blue jug of hot water, and after I had washed and combed I found my way down to the dining-room.

What I expected to find there I hardly know. What I did find was a large chamber, as dingy as the rest of the house, and as much in need of refreshing, with a long table down the middle, at which some twenty persons sat eating, with the landlady presiding at the top.

The company, who were of both sexes and chiefly elderly, seemed to me at that first sight to be dressed in every variety of out-of-date clothes, many of them rather shabby and some almost grotesque.

Raising their faces from their plates they looked at me as I entered, and I was so confused that I stood hesitating near the door until the landlady called to me.

''Come up here,'' she said, and when I had done so, and taken the seat by her side, which had evidently been reserved for me, she whispered:

''I don't think my sister mentioned your name, my dear. What is it?''

I had no time to deliberate.

''O'Neill,'' I whispered back, and thereupon my landlady, raising her voice, and addressing the company as if they had been members of her family, said:

''Mrs. O'Neill, my dears.''

Then the ladies at the table inclined their heads at me and smiled, while the men (especially those who were the most strangely dressed) rose from their seats and bowed deeply.

EIGHTIETH CHAPTER

Of all houses in London this, I thought, was the least suitable to me.

Looking down the table I told myself that it must be the very home of idle gossip and the hot-bed of tittle-tattle.

I was wrong. Hardly had I been in the house a day when I realised that my fellow-guests were the most reserved and self-centred of all possible people.

One old gentleman who wore a heavy moustache, and had been a colonel in the Indian army, was understood to be a student of Biblical prophecy, having collected some thousands of texts which established the identity of the British nation with the lost tribes of Israel.

Another old gentleman, who wore a patriarchal beard and had taken orders without securing a living, was believed to be writing a history of the world and (after forty years of continuous labour) to have reached the century before Christ.

An elderly lady with a benign expression was said to be a tragic actress who was studying in secret for a season at the National Theatre.

Such, and of such kind, were my house-mates; and I have since been told that every great city has many such groups of people, the great prophets, the great historians, the great authors, the great actors whom the world does not know—the odds and ends of humanity, thrown aside by the rushing river of life into the gulley-ways that line its banks, the odd brothers, the odd sisters, the odd uncles, the odd aunts, for whom there is no place in the family, in society, or in the business of the world.

It was all very curious and pathetic, yet I think I should have been safe, for a time at all events, in this little corner of London into which chance had so strangely thrown me, but for one unfortunate happening.

That was the arrival of the daily newspaper.

There was never more than a single copy. It came at eight in the morning and was laid on the dining-room mantelpiece, from which (by an unwritten law of the house) it was the duty as well as the honour of the person who had first finished breakfast to take it up and read the most startling part of the news to the rest of the company.

Thus it occurred that on the third morning after my arrival I was startled by the voice of the old colonel, who, standing back to the fire, with the newspaper in his hand, cried:

"Mysterious Disappearance of a Peeress."

"Read it," said the old clergyman.

The tea-cup which I was raising to my mouth trembled in my hand, and when I set it down it rattled against the saucer. I knew what was coming, and it came.

The old colonel read:

"A telegram from Blackwater announces the mysterious disappearance of the young wife of Lord Raa, which appears to

have taken place late on Thursday night or in the early hours of Friday morning.

"It will be remembered that the missing lady was married a little more than a year ago, and her disappearance is the more unaccountable from the fact that during the past month she has been actively occupied in preparing for a fête in honour of her return home after a long and happy honeymoon.

"The pavilion in which the fête was to have been held had been erected on a headland between Castle Raa and a precipitous declivity to the sea, and the only reasonable conjecture is that the unhappy lady, going out on Thursday night to superintend the final preparations, lost her way in the darkness and fell over the cliffs.

"The fact that the hostess was missing was not generally known in Ellan until the guests had begun to arrive for the reception on Friday evening, when the large assembly broke up in great confusion.

"Naturally much sympathy is felt for the grief-stricken husband."

After the colonel had finished reading I had an almost irresistible impulse to scream, feeling sure that the moment my house-mates looked into my face they must see that I was the person indicated.

They did not look, and after a chorus of exclamations ("Most mysterious!" "What can have become of her?" "On the eve of her fête too!") they began to discuss disappearances in general, each illustrating his point by reference to the subject of his own study.

"Perfectly extraordinary how people disappear nowadays," said one.

"Extraordinary, sir?" said the old colonel, looking over his spectacles, "why should it be extraordinary that one person should disappear when whole nations—the ten tribes for example. . . ."

"But that's a different thing altogether," said the old clergyman. "Now if you had quoted Biblical examples—Elisha or perhaps Jonah. . . ."

After the discussion had gone on for several minutes in this way I rose from the table on my trembling limbs and slipped out of the room.

It would take long to tell of the feverish days that followed

—how newspaper correspondents were sent from London to Ellan to inquire into the circumstances of my disappearance; how the theory of accident gave place to the theory of suicide, and the theory of suicide to the theory of flight; how a porter on the pier at Blackwater said he had carried my trunk to the steamer that sailed on Thursday midnight, thinking I was a maid from the great house until I had given him half-a-crown (his proper fee being threepence); how two female passengers had declared that a person answering to my description had sailed with them to Liverpool; how these clues had been followed up and had led to nothing; and how, finally, the correspondents had concluded the whole incident of my disappearance could not be more mysterious if I had been dropped from mid-air into the middle of the Irish Sea.

But then came another development.

My father, who was reported to have received the news of my departure in a way that suggested he had lost control of his senses (raging and storming at my husband like a man demented), having come to the conclusion that I, being in a physical condition peculiar to women, had received a serious shock resulting in a loss of memory, offered five hundred pounds reward for information that would lead to my discovery, which was not only desirable to allay the distress of my heart-broken family but urgently necessary to settle important questions of title and inheritance.

With this offer of a reward came a description of my personal appearance.

"Age 20, a little under medium height; slight; very black hair; lustrous dark eyes; regular features; pale face; grave expression; unusually sunny smile."

It would be impossible for me to say with what perturbation I heard these reports read out by the old colonel and the old clergyman. Even the nervous stirring of my spoon and the agitated clatter of my knife and fork made me wonder that my house-mates did not realise the truth, which must, I thought, be plainly evident to all eyes.

They never did, being so utterly immersed in their own theories. But all the same I sometimes felt as if my fellow guests in that dingy house in Bloomsbury were my judges and jury, and more than once, in my great agitation, when the reports came near to the truth, I wanted to cry, "Stop, stop, don't you see it is I?"

That I never did so was due to the fact that, not knowing what legal powers my father might have to compel my return to Ellan, the terror that sat on me like a nightmare was that of being made the subject of a public quarrel between my father and my husband, concerning the legitimacy of my unborn child, with the shame and disgrace which that would bring not only upon me but upon Martin.

I had some reason for this fear.

After my father's offer of a reward there came various spiteful paragraphs (inspired, as I thought, by Alma and written by the clumsier hand of my husband) saying it was reported in Ellan that, if my disappearance was to be accounted for on the basis of flight, the only "shock" I could have experienced must be a shock of conscience, rumour having for some time associated my name with that of a person who was not unknown in connection with Antarctic exploration.

It was terrible.

Day by way the motive of my disappearance became the sole topic of conversation in our boarding-house. I think the landlady must have provided an evening as well as a morning paper, for at tea in the drawing-room upstairs the most recent reports were always being discussed.

After a while I realised that not only my house-mates but all London was discussing my disappearance.

It was a rule of our boarding-house that during certain hours of the day everybody should go out as if he had business to go to, and having nothing else to do I used to walk up and down the streets. In doing so I was compelled to pass certain newsvendors' stalls, and I saw for several days that nearly every placard had something about "the missing peeress."

When this occurred I would walk quickly along the thoroughfare with a sense of being pursued and the feeling which a nervous woman has when she is going down a dark corridor at night—that noiseless footsteps are coming behind, and a hand may at any moment be laid on her shoulder.

But nobody troubled me in the streets and the only person in our boarding-house who seemed to suspect me was our landlady. She said nothing, but when my lip was quivering while the old colonel read that cruel word about Martin I caught her little grey eyes looking aslant at me.

One afternoon, her sister, the milliner, came to see me according to her promise, and though she, too, said nothing, I saw that, while the old colonel and the old clergyman were disputing on the hearthrug about some disappearance which occurred thousands of years ago, she was looking fixedly at the fingers with which, in my nervousness, I was ruckling up the discoloured chintz of my chair.

Then in a moment—I don't know why—it flashed upon me that my travelling companion was in correspondence with my father.

That idea became so insistent towards dinner-time that I made pretence of being ill (which was not very difficult) to retire to my room, where the cockney chambermaid wrung handkerchiefs out of vinegar and laid them on my forehead to relieve my headache—though she increased it, poor thing, by talking perpetually.

Next morning the landlady came up to say that if, as she assumed from my name, I was Irish and a Catholic, I might like to receive a visit from a Sister of Mercy who called at the house at intervals to attend to the sick.

I thought I saw in a moment that this was a subterfuge, but feeling that my identity was suspected I dared not give cause for further suspicion, so I compelled myself to agree.

A few minutes later, having got up and dressed, I was standing with my back to the window, feeling like one who would soon have to face an attack, when a soft footstep came up my corridor and a gentle hand knocked at my door.

"Come in," I cried, trembling like the last leaf at the end of a swinging bough.

And then an astonishing thing happened.

A young woman stepped quietly into the room and closed the door behind her. She was wearing the black and white habit of the Little Sisters of the Poor, but I knew her long, pale, plain-featured face in an instant.

A flood of shame, and at the same time a flood of joy swept over me at the sight of her.

It was Mildred Bankes.

EIGHTY-FIRST CHAPTER

"Mary," said Mildred, "speak low and tell me everything."

She sat in my chair, I knelt by her side, took one of her hands in both of mine, and told her.

I told her that I had fled from my husband's house because I could not bear to remain there any longer.

I told her that my father had married me against my will, in spite of my protests, when I was a child, and did not know that I had any right to resist him.

I told her that my father—God forgive me if I did him a wrong—did not love me, that he had sacrificed my happiness to his lust of power, and that if he were searching for me now it was only because my absence disturbed his plans and hurt his pride.

I told her that my husband did not love me either, and that he had married me from the basest motives, merely to pay his debts and secure an income.

I told her, too, that not only did my husband not love me, but he loved somebody else, that he had been cruel and brutal to me, and therefore (for these and other reasons) I could not return to him under any circumstances.

While I was speaking I felt Mildred's hand twitching between mine, and when I had finished she said:

"But, my dear child, they told me your friends were broken-hearted about you; that you had lost your memory and perhaps your reason, and therefore it would be a good act to help them to send you home."

"It's not true, it's not true," I said.

And then in a low voice, as if afraid of being overheard, she told me how she came to be there—that the woman who had travelled with me in the train from Liverpool, seeing my father's offer of a reward, had written to him to say that she knew where I was and only needed somebody to establish my identity; that my father wished to come to London for this purpose, but had been forbidden by his doctor; that our parish priest, Father Donovan, had volunteered to come instead, but had been prohibited by his Bishop; and finally that my father had written to his lawyers in London, and Father Dan to her, knowing that she and I had been together at the Sacred Heart in Rome, and that it was her work now to look after lost ones and send them safely back to their people.

"And now the lawyer and the doctors are downstairs," she said in a whisper, "and they are only waiting for me to say who you are that they may apply for an order to send you home."

This terrified me so much that I made a fervent appeal to Mildred to save me.

"Oh, Mildred, save me, save me," I cried.

"But how can I? How can I?" she asked.

I saw what she meant, and thinking to touch her still more deeply I told her the rest of my story.

I told her that if I had fled from my husband's house it was not merely because he had been cruel and brutal to me, but because I, too, loved somebody else—somebody who was far away but was coming back, and there was nothing I could not bear for him in the meantime, no pain or suffering or loneliness, and when he returned he would protect me from every danger, and we should love each other eternally.

If I had not been so wildly agitated I should have known that this was the wrong way with Mildred, and it was not until I had said it all in a rush of whispered words that I saw her eyes fixed on me as if they were about to start from their sockets.

"But, my dear, dear child," she said, "this is worse and worse. Your father and your husband may have done wrong, but you have done wrong too. Don't you see you have?"

I did not tell her that I had thought of all that before, and did not believe any longer that God would punish me for breaking a bond I had been forced to make. But when she was about to rise, saying that after all it would be a good thing to send me home before I had time to join my life to his—whoever he was—who had led me to forget my duty as a wife, I held her trembling hands and whispered:

"Wait, Mildred. There is something I have not told you even yet."

"What is it?" she asked, but already I could see that she knew what I was going to say.

"Mildred," I said, "if I ran away from my husband it was not merely because I loved somebody else, but because. . . ."

I could not say it. Do what I would I could not. But holy women like Mildred, who spend their lives among the lost ones, have a way of reading a woman's heart when it is in trouble, and Mildred read mine.

"Do you mean that . . . that there are consequences . . . going to be?" she whispered.

"Yes."

"Does your husband know?"

"Yes."

"And your father?"

"No."

Mildred drew her hand away from me and crossed herself, saying beneath her breath:

"Oh Mother of my God!"

I felt more humbled than I had ever been before, but after a while I said:

"Now you see why I can never go back. And you will save me, will you not?"

There was silence for some moments. Mildred had drawn back in her chair as if an evil spirit had passed between us. But at length she said:

"It is not for me to judge you, Mary. But the gentlemen will come up soon to know if you are the Mary O'Neill whom I knew at the Sacred Heart, and what am I to say to them?"

"Say no," I cried. "Why shouldn't you? They'll never know anything to the contrary. Nobody will know."

"Nobody?"

I knew what Mildred meant, and in my shame and confusion I tried to excuse myself by telling her who the other woman was.

"It is Alma," I said.

"Alma? Alma Lier?"

"Yes."

And then I told her how Alma had come back into my life, how she had tortured and tempted me, and was now trying to persuade my husband, who was a Protestant, to divorce me that she might take my place.

And then I spoke of Martin again—I could not help it—saying that the shame which Alma would bring on him would be a greater grief to me than anything else that could befall me in this world.

"If you only knew who he is," I said, "and the honour he is held in, you would know that I would rather die a thousand deaths than that any disgrace should fall on him through me."

I could see that Mildred was deeply moved at this, and though I did not intend to play upon her feelings, yet in the selfishness of my great love I could not help doing so.

"You were the first of my girl friends, Mildred—the very first. Don't you remember the morning after I arrived at school? They had torn me away from my mother, and I was so little and lonely, but you were so sweet and kind. You took me into church for my first visitation, and then into the garden for my first rosary—don't you remember it?"

Mildred had closed her eyes. Her face was becoming very white.

"And then don't you remember the day the news came that my mother was very ill, and I was to go home? You came to see me off at the station, and don't you remember what you said when we were sitting in the train? You said we might never meet again, because our circumstances would be so different. You didn't think we should meet like this, did you?''

Mildred's face was growing deadly white.

''My darling mother died. She was all I had in the world and I was all she had, and when she was gone there was no place for me in my father's house, so I was sent back to school. But the Reverend Mother was very kind to me, and the end of it was that I wished to become a nun. Yes indeed, and never so much as on the day you took your vows.''

Mildred's eyes were still closed, but her eyelids were fluttering and she was breathing audibly.

''How well I remember it! The sweet summer morning and the snow-white sunshine, and the white flowers and the white chapel of the Little Sisters, and then you dressed as a bride in your white gown and long white veil. I cried all through the ceremony. And if my father had not come for me then, perhaps I should have been a nun like you now.''

Mildred's lips were moving. I was sure she was praying to our Lady for strength to resist my pleading, yet that only made me plead the harder.

''But God knows best what our hearts are made for,'' I said. ''He knows that mine was made for love. And though you may not think it I know God knows that he who is away is my real husband—not the one they married me to. You will not separate us, will you? All our happiness—his and mine—is in your hands. You will save us, will you not?''

Some time passed before Mildred spoke. It may have been only a few moments, but to me it seemed like an eternity. I did not know then that Mildred was reluctant to extinguish the last spark of hope in me. At length she said:

''Mary, you don't know what you are asking me to do. When I took my vows I promised to speak the truth under all circumstances, no matter what the consequences, as surely as I should answer to God at the great Day of Judgment. Yet you wish me to lie. How can I? How can I? Remember my vows, my duty.''

I think the next few minutes must have been the most evil of all my life. When I saw, or thought I saw, that, though one word would save me, one little word, Mildred intended to give me away to the men downstairs, I leapt to my feet and burst out on her with the bitterest reproaches.

"You religious women are always talking about your duty," I cried. "You never think about love. Love is kind and merciful; but no, duty, always duty! Love indeed! What do you cold creatures out of the convent, with your crosses and rosaries, know about love—real love—the blazing fire in a woman's heart when she loves somebody so much that she would give her heart's blood for him—yes, and her soul itself if need be."

What else I said I cannot remember, for I did not know what I was doing until I found myself looking out of the window and panting for breath.

Then I became aware that Mildred was making no reply to my reproaches, and looking over my shoulder I saw that she was still sitting in my chair with both her hands covering her face and the tears trickling through her fingers on to the linen of her habit.

That conquered me in a moment.

I was seized with such remorse that I wished to throw my arms about her neck and kiss her. I dared not do that, now, but I knelt by her side again and asked her to forgive me.

"Forgive me, sister," I said. "I see now that God has brought us to this pass and there is no way out of it. You must do what you think is right. I shall always know you couldn't have done otherwise. *He* will know too. And if it must be that disgrace is to fall on him through me . . . and that when he comes home he will find . . ."

But I could not bear to speak about that, so I dropped my head on Mildred's lap.

During the silence that followed we heard the sound of footsteps coming up the stairs.

"Listen! They're here," said Mildred. "Get up. Say nothing. Leave everything to me."

I rose quickly and returned to the window. Mildred dried her eyes, got up from the chair and stood with her back to the fire-place.

There was a knock at my door. I do not know which of us answered it, but my landlady came into the room, followed by three men in tall silk hats.

"Excuse us, my dear," she said, in an insincere voice. "These gentlemen are making an examination of the house, and they wish to see your room. May they?"

I do not think I made any reply. I was holding my breath and watching intently. The men made a pretence of glancing round, but I could see they were looking at Mildred. Their looks seemed to say as plainly as words could speak:

"Is it she?"

Mildred hesitated for a moment, there was a dreadful silence and then—may the Holy Virgin bless her!—she shook her head.

I could bear no more. I turned back to the window. The men, who had looked at each other with expressions of surprise, tried to talk together in ordinary tones as if on commonplace subjects.

"So there's nothing to do here, apparently."

"Apparently not."

"Let's go, then. Good day, Sister. Sorry to have troubled you."

I heard the door close behind them. I heard their low voices as they passed along the corridor. I heard their slow footsteps as they went down the stairs. And then, feeling as if my heart would burst, I turned to throw myself at Sister Mildred's feet.

But Sister Mildred was on her knees, with her face buried in my bed, praying fervently.

EIGHTY-SECOND CHAPTER

I DID not know then, and it seems unnecessary to say now, why my father gave up the search for me in London. He did so, and from the day the milliner's clue failed him I moved about freely.

Then from the sense of being watched I passed into that of being lost.

Sister Mildred was my only friend in London, but she was practically cut off from me. The Little Sisters had fixed her up (in the interests of her work among the lost ones) in a tiny flat at the top of a lofty building near Piccadilly, where her lighted window always reminded me of a lighthouse on the edge of a dangerous reef. But in giving me her address she warned me not to come to her except in case of urgent need, partly because further intercourse might discredit her denial, and partly because it would not be good for me to be called "one of Sister Veronica's girls"—that being Mildred's name as a nun.

Oh the awful loneliness of London!

Others just as friendless have wandered in the streets of the big city. I knew I was not the first, and I am sure I have not been the last to find London the most solitary place in the world. But I really and truly think there was one day of the week when, from causes peculiar to my situation, my loneliness must have been deeper than that of the most friendless refugee.

Nearly every boarder in our boarding-house used to receive once a week or once a month a letter containing a remittance from some unknown source, with which he paid his landlady and discharged his other obligations.

I had no such letter to receive, so to keep up the character I had not made but allowed myself to maintain (of being a commander's wife) I used to go out once a week under pretence of calling at a shipping office to draw part of my husband's pay.

In my childish ignorance of the habits of business people I selected Saturday afternoon for this purpose; and in my fear of encountering my husband, or my husband's friends in the West End streets, I chose the less conspicuous thoroughfares at the other side of the river.

Oh, the wearisome walks I had on Saturday afternoons, wet or dry, down the Seven Dials, across Trafalgar Square, along Whitehall, round the eastern end of the Houses of Parliament, and past Westminster Pier (dear to me from one poignant memory), and so on and on into the monotonous and inconspicuous streets beyond.

Towards nightfall I would return, generally by the footway across Hungerford Bridge, which is thereby associated with the most painful moments of my life, for nowhere else did I feel quite so helpless and so lonely.

The trains out of Charing Cross shrieking past me, the dark river flowing beneath, the steamers whistling under the bridge, the automobiles tooting along the Embankment, the clanging of the electric cars, the arc lamps burning over the hotels and the open flares blazing over the theatres—all the never-resting life of London—and myself in the midst of the tumultuous solitude, a friendless and homeless girl.

But God in His mercy saved me from all that—saved me too, in ways in which it was only possible to save a woman.

The first way was through my vanity.

Glancing at myself in my mottled mirror one morning I was shocked to see that what with my loneliness and my weary walks I was losing my looks, for my cheeks were hollow, my nose was pinched, my eyes were heavy with dark rings underneath them, and I was plainer than Martin had ever seen me.

This frightened me.

It would be ridiculous to tell all the foolish things I did after that to improve and preserve my appearance for Martin's sake, because every girl whose sweetheart is away knows quite well, and it is not important that anybody else should.

There was a florist's shop in Southampton Row, and I went there every morning for a little flower which I wore in the breast of my bodice, making believe to myself that Martin had given it to me.

There was a jeweller's shop there too, and I sold my wedding ring (having long felt as if it burnt my finger) and bought another wedding ring with an inscription on the inside *"From Martin to Mary."*

As a result of all this caressing of myself I saw after a while, to my great joy, that my good looks were coming back; and it would be silly to say what a thrill of delight I had when, going into the drawing-room of our boarding-house one day, the old actress called me "Beauty" instead of the name I had hitherto been known by.

The second way in which God saved me from my loneliness was through my condition.

I did not yet know what angel was whispering to me out of the physical phase I was passing through, when suddenly I became possessed by a passion for children.

It was just as if a whole new world of humanity sprang into life for me by magic. When I went out for my walks in the streets I ceased to be conscious of the faces of men and women, and it seemed as if London were peopled by children only.

I saw no more of the crowds going their different ways like ants on an ant-hill, but I could not let a perambulator pass without peering under the lace of the hood at the little cherub face whose angel eyes looked up at me.

There was an asylum for children suffering from incurable diseases in the smaller square beside our boarding-house, and every morning after breakfast, no matter how cold the day might be, I would open my window to hear the cheerful voices of the suffering darlings singing their hymn:

"There's a Friend for little children,
Above the bright blue sky."

Thus six weeks passed, Christmas approached, and the sad old city began to look glad and young and gay.

Since a certain night at Castle Raa I had had a vague feeling that I had thrown myself out of the pale of the Church, therefore I had never gone to service since I came to London, and had almost forgotten that confession and the mass used to be sweet to me.

But going home one evening in the deepening London fog (for the weather had begun to be frosty) I saw, through the open doors of a Catholic church, a great many lights in a side chapel, and found they were from a little illuminated model of the Nativity with the Virgin and Child in the stable among the straw. A group of untidy children were looking at it with bright beady eyes and chattering under their breath, while a black-robed janitor was rattling his keys to make them behave.

This brought back the memory of Rome and of Sister Angela. But it also made me think of Martin, and remember his speech at the public dinner, about saying the prayers for the day with his comrades, that they might feel that they were not cut off from the company of Christian men.

So telling myself he must be back by this time on that lonely plateau that guards the Pole, I resolved (without thinking of the difference of time) to go to mass on Christmas morning, in order to be doing the same thing as Martin at the same moment.

With this in my mind I returned to our boarding-house and found Christmas there too, for on looking into the drawing-room on my way upstairs I saw the old actress, standing on a chair, hanging holly which the old colonel with old-fashioned courtesy was handing up to her.

They were cackling away like two old hens when they caught sight of me, whereupon the old actress cried:

"Ah, here's Beauty!"

Then she asked me if I would like a ticket for a dress rehearsal on Christmas Eve of a Christmas pantomime.

"The audience will be chiefly children out of the lanes and alleys round about, but perhaps you won't mind that," she said.

I told her I should be overjoyed, and at two o'clock the following afternoon I was in my seat at the corner of the dress-circle of the great theatre, from which I could see both the stage and the auditorium.

The vast place was packed with children from ceiling to floor, and I could see the invisible hands of thousands of mothers who had put the girls into clean pinafores and brushed and oiled the tousled heads of the boys.

How their eager faces glistened! How sad they looked when the wicked sisters left Cinderella alone in the kitchen! How bright when the glittering fairy godmother came to visit her! How their little dangling feet clapped together with joy when the pretty maid went off to the ball behind six little ponies which pranced along under the magical moonlight in the falling snow!

But the part of the performance which they liked best was their own part when, in the interval, the band struck up one of the songs they sang in their lanes and alleys:

"Yew aw the enny, Oi em ther bee,
Oi'd like ter sip ther enny from those red lips yew see."

That was so loaded with the memory of one of the happiest days of my life (the day I went with Martin to see the *Scotia*) that, in the yearning of the motherhood still unborn in me, I felt as if I should like to gather the whole screaming houseful of happy children to my breast.

But oh why, why, why, does not Providence warn us when we are on the edge of tragic things?

The pantomime rehearsal being over I was hurrying home (for the evening was cold, though I was so warm within) when I became aware of a number of newsmen who were flying up from the direction of the Strand, crying their papers at the top of their voice.

I did not usually listen to such people, but I was compelled to do so now, for they were all around me.

"Paper—third e'shen—loss of the Sco-sha."

The cry fell on me like a thunderbolt. An indescribable terror seized me. I felt paralysed and stood dead still. People were buying copies of the papers, and at first I made a feeble effort to do the same. But my voice was faint; the newsman did not hear me and he went flying past.

"Paper—third e'shen—reported loss of the Sco-sha."

After that I dared not ask for a paper. Literally I dared not. I dared not know the truth. I dared not see the dreadful fact in print.

So I began to hurry home. But as I passed through the streets, stunned, stupefied, perspiring, feeling as if I were running away from some malignant curse, the newsmen seemed to be pursuing me, for they were darting out from every street.

"Paper—third e'shen—loss of the Sco-sha."

Faster and faster I hurried along. But the awful cry was always ringing in my ears, behind, before, and on either side.

When I reached our boarding-house my limbs could scarcely support me. I had hardly strength enough to pull the bell. And before our young waiter had opened the door two newsmen, crossing the square, were crying:

"Paper—third edition—reported loss of the 'Scotia.' "

EIGHTY-THIRD CHAPTER

As I passed through the hall the old colonel and the old clergyman were standing by the dining-room door. They were talking excitedly, and while I was going upstairs, panting hard and holding on by the handrail, I heard part of their conversation.

"Scotia was the name of the South Pole ship, wasn't it?"

"Certainly it was. We must send young John out for a paper."

Reaching my room I dropped into my chair. My faculties had so failed me that for some minutes I was unable to think. Presently my tired brain recalled the word "Reported" and to that my last hope began to cling as a drowning sailor clings to a drifting spar.

After a while I heard some of our boarders talking on the floor below. Opening my door and listening eagerly I heard one of them say, in such a casual tone:

"Rather sad—this South Pole business, isn't it?"

"Yes, if it's true."

"Doesn't seem much doubt about that—unless there are two ships of the same name, you know."

At that my heart leapt up. I had now two rafts to cling to. Just then the gong sounded, and my anxiety compelled me to go down to tea.

As I entered the drawing-room the old colonel was unfolding a newspaper.

"Here we are," he was saying. "Reported loss of the *Scotia*—Appalling Antarctic Calamity."

I tried to slide into the seat nearest to the door, but the old actress made room for me on the sofa close to the tea-table.

"You enjoyed the rehearsal? Yes?" she whispered.

"Hush!" said our landlady, handing me a cup of tea, and then the old colonel, standing back to the fire, began to read.

"Telegrams from New Zealand report the picking up of large fragments of a ship which were floating from the Antarctic seas. Among them were the bulwarks, some portions of the deck cargo, and the stern of a boat, bearing the name 'Scotia.'

"Grave fears are entertained that these fragments belong to the schooner of the South Pole expedition, which left Akaroa a few weeks ago, and the character of some of the remnants (being vital parts of a ship's structure) lead to the inference that the vessel herself must have foundered."

"Well, well," said the old clergyman, with his mouth full of buttered toast.

The walls of the room seemed to be moving around me. I could scarcely see; I could scarcely hear.

"Naturally there can be no absolute certainty that the 'Scotia' may not be still afloat, or that the members of the expedition may not have reached a place of safety, but the presence of large pieces of ice attached to some of the fragments seem to the best authorities to favour the theory that the unfortunate vessel was struck by one of the huge icebergs which have lately been floating up from the direction of the Admiralty Mountains, and in that case her fate will probably remain one of the many insoluble mysteries of the ocean."

"Now that's what one might call the irony of fate," said the old clergyman, "seeing that the object of the expedition . . ."

"Hush!"

"While the sympathy of the public will be extended to the families of all the explorers who have apparently perished in a brave effort to protect mankind from one of the worst dangers of the great deep, the entire world will mourn the loss (as we fear it may be) of the heroic young Commander, Doctor Martin Conrad, who certainly belonged to the ever-diminishing race of dauntless and intrepid souls who seem to be born with that sacred courage which leads men to render up their lives at the lure of the Unknown and the call of a great idea."

I felt as if I were drowning. At one moment there was the shrieking of waves about my face; at the next the rolling of billows over my head.

"*Though it seems only too certain . . . this sacred courage quenched . . . let us not think such lives as his are wasted . . . only wasted lives . . . lives given up . . . inglorious ease . . . pursuit of idle amusements. . . . Therefore let loved ones left behind . . . take comfort . . . inspiring thought . . . if lost . . . not died in vain. . . . Never pleasure but Death . . . the lure that draws true hearts. . . .*"

I heard no more. The old colonel's voice, which had been beating on my brain like a hammer, seemed to die away in the distance.

"How hard you are breathing. What is amiss?" said our landlady.

I made no reply. Rising to my feet I became giddy and held on to the table cloth to prevent myself from falling.

The landlady jumped up to protect her crockery and at the same moment the old actress led me from the room. I excused myself on the ground of faintness, and the heat of the house after my quick walk home from the theatre.

Back in my bedroom my limbs gave way and I sank to the floor with my head on the chair. There was no uncertainty for me now. It was all over. The great love which had engrossed my life had gone.

In the overwhelming shock of that moment I could not think of the world's loss. I could not even think of Martin's. I could only think of my own, and once more I felt as if something of myself had been torn out of my breast.

"Why? Why?" I was crying in the depths of my heart—why, when I was so utterly alone, so helpless and so friendless, had the light by which I lived been quenched.

After a while the gong sounded for dinner. I got up and lay on the bed. The young waiter brought up some dishes on a tray. I sent them down again. Then time passed and again I heard voices on the floor below.

"Rough on that young peeress if Conrad has gone down, eh?"

"What peeress?"

"Don't you remember—the one who ran away from that reprobate Raa?"

"Ah, yes, certainly. I remember now."

"Of course, Conrad was the man pointed at, and perhaps if he had lived to come back he might have stood up for the poor thing, but now . . ."

"Ah, well, that's the way, you see."

The long night passed.

Sometimes it seemed to go with feet of lead, sometimes with galloping footsteps. I remember that the clocks outside seemed to strike every few minutes, and then not to strike at all. At one moment I heard the bells of a neighbouring church ringing merrily, and by that I knew it was Christmas morning.

I did not sleep during the first hours of night, but somewhere in the blank reaches of that short space between night and day (like the slack-water between ebb and flow), which is the only time when London rests, I fell into a troubled doze.

I wish I had not done so, for at the first moment of returning consciousness I had that sense, so familiar to bereaved ones, of memory rushing over me like a surging tide. I did not cry, but I felt as if my heart were bleeding.

The morning dawned dark and foggy. In the thick air of my room the window looked at me like a human eye scaled with cataract. It was my first experience of a real London fog and I was glad of it. If there had been one ray of sunshine that morning I think my heart would have broken.

The cockney chambermaid came with her jug of hot water and wished me "a merry Christmas." I did my best to answer her.

The young waiter came with my breakfast. I told him to set it down, but I did not touch it.

Then the cockney chambermaid came back to make up my room and, finding me still in bed, asked if I would like a fire. I answered "Yes," and while she was lighting a handful between the two bars of my little grate she talked of the news in the newspaper.

"It don't do to speak no harm of the dead, but as to them men as 'ad a collusion with a iceberg in the Australier sea, serve 'em jolly well right I say. What was they a-doing down there, risking their lives for nothing, when they ought to have been a-thinking of their wives and children. My Tom wanted to go for a sailor, but I wouldn't let him! Not me! 'If you're married to a sailor,' says I, ' 'alf your time you never knows whether you 'as a 'usband or 'asn't.' 'Talk sense,' says Tom. 'I *am* a-talking sense,' says I, 'and then think of the kiddies,' I says.''

After a while I got up and dressed and sat long hours before the fire. I tried to think of others beside myself who must be suffering from the same disaster—especially of Martin's mother and the good old doctor. I pictured the sweet kitchen-parlour in Sunny Lodge, with the bright silver bowls on the high mantelpiece. There was no fire under the *slouree* now. The light of that house was out, and two old people were sitting on either side of a cold hearth.

I passed in review my maidenhood, my marriage, and my love, and told myself that the darkest days of my loneliness in London had hitherto been relieved by one bright hope. I had only to live on and Martin would come back to me. But now I was utterly alone. I was in the presence of nothingness. The sanctuary within me where Martin had lived was only a cemetery of the soul.

''Why? Why? Why?'' I cried again, but there was no answer.

Thus I passed my Christmas Day (for which I had formed such different plans), and I hardly knew if it was for punishment or warning that I was at last compelled to think of something besides my own loss.

My unborn child!

No man on earth can know anything about that tragic prospect, though millions of women must have had to face it. To have a child coming that is doomed before its birth to be fatherless—there is nothing in the world like that.

I think the bitterest part of my grief was that nobody could ever know. If Martin had lived he would have leapt to acknowledge his offspring in spite of all the laws and conventions of life. But being dead he could not be charged with it. Therefore the name of the father of my unborn child must never, never, never be disclosed.

The thickening of the fog told me that the day was passing.

It passed. The houses on the opposite side of the square vanished in a vaporous, yellow haze, and their lighted windows were like rows of bloodshot eyes looking out of the blackness.

Except the young waiter and the chambermaid nobody visited me until a little before dinner time. Then the old actress came up, rather fantastically dressed (with a kind of laurel crown on her head), to say that the boarders were going to have a dance and wished me to join them. I excused myself on the ground of headache, and she said:

"Young women often suffer from it. It's a pity, though! Christmas night, too!"

Not long after she had gone, I heard, through the frequent tooting of the taxis in the street, the sound of old-fashioned waltzes being played on the piano, and then a dull thudding noise on the floor below, mingled with laughter, which told me that the old boarders were dancing.

I dare say my head was becoming light. I had eaten nothing for nearly forty hours, and perhaps the great shock which chance had given me had brought me near to the blank shadowland which is death.

I remember that in some vague way there arose before me a desire to die. It was not to be suicide—my religion saved me from that—but death by exhaustion, by continuing to abstain from food, having no desire for it.

Martin was gone—what was there to live for? Had I not better die before my child came to life? And if I could go where Martin was I should be with him eternally.

Still I did not weep, but—whether audibly or only in the unconscious depths of my soul—more than once I cried to Martin by name.

"Martin! Martin! I am coming to you!"

I was in this mood (sitting in my chair as I had done all day and staring into the small slow fire which was slipping to the bottom of the grate) when I heard a soft step in the corridor outside. At the next moment my door was opened noiselessly, and somebody stepped into the room.

It was Mildred, and she knelt by my side and said in a low voice:

"You are in still deeper trouble, Mary—tell me."

I tried to pour out my heart to her as to a mother, but I could not do so, and indeed there was no necessity. The thought that must have rushed into my eyes was instantly reflected in hers.

"It is he, isn't it?" she whispered, and I could only bow my head.

"I thought so from the first," she said. "And now you are thinking of . . . of what is to come?"

Again I could only bow, but Mildred put her arms about me and said:

"Don't lose heart, dear. Our Blessed Lady sent me to take care of you. And I will—I will."

MEMORANDUM BY MARTIN CONRAD

Surely Chance must be the damnedest conspirator against human happiness, or my darling could never have been allowed to suffer so much from the report that my ship was lost.

What actually happened is easily told.

Two days after we left Akaroa, N.Z., which was the last we saw of the world before we set our faces towards the Unknown, we ran into a heavy lumpy sea and made bad weather of it for forty-eight hours.

Going at good speed, however, we proceeded south on meridian 179 degrees E., latitude 68, when (just as we were sighting the Admiralty Mountains, our first glimpse of the regions of the Pole) we encountered a south-westerly gale, which, with our cumbersome deck cargo, made the handling of the ship difficult.

Nevertheless the *Scotia* rode bravely for several hours over the mountainous seas, though sometimes she rolled fifty degrees from side to side.

Towards nightfall we shipped a good deal of water; the sea smashed in part of our starboard bulwarks, destroyed the upper deck, washed out the galley, carried off two of our life boats and sent other large fragments of the vessel floating away to leeward.

At last the pumps became choked, and the water found its way to the engine-room. So to prevent further disaster we put out the fires, and then started, all hands, to bale out with buckets.

It was a sight to see every man-jack at work on that job (scientific staff included), and you would not have thought out spirits were much damped, whatever our bodies may have been, if you had been there when I cried, "Are we downhearted, shipmates?" and heard the shout that came up from fifty men (some of them waist deep in the water):

"No!"

We had a stiff tussle until after midnight, but we stuck hard, and before we turned into our bunks, we had fought the sea and beaten it.

Next morning broke fine and clear, with that fresh crisp air of the Antarctic which is the same to the explorer as the sniff of battle to the warhorse, and no sign of the storm except the sight of some dead-white icebergs which had been torn from the islands south-west of us.

Everybody was in high spirits at breakfast, and when one of the company started "Sweethearts and Wives" all hands joined in the chorus, and (voice or no voice) I had a bit of a go at it myself.

It is not the most solemn music ever slung together, but perhaps no anthem sung in a cathedral has ascended to heaven with a heartier spirit of thanksgiving.

When I went up on deck again, though, I saw that enough of our "wooden walls" had gone overboard to give "scarey people" the impression (if things were ever picked up, as I knew they would be, for the set of the current was to the north-east) that we had foundered, and that made me think of my dear one.

We had no wireless aboard, and the ship would not be going back to New Zealand until March, so I was helpless to correct the error; but I determined that the very first message from the very first station I set up on the Antarctic continent should be sent to her to say that I was safe and everything going splendid.

What happened on Christmas day is a longer story.

On the eighteenth of December, having landed some of my deck cargo and provisions, and sent up my ship to winter quarters, I was on my way, with ponies, dogs, and sledges and a large company of men, all in A1 condition, to the lower summit of Mount Erebus, for I intended to set up my first electric-power-wave station there—that being high enough, we thought, to permit of a message reaching the plateau of the Polar zone and low enough (allowing for the curvature of the earth) to cover the maximum distance in a northerly direction.

It was a long reach, but we chose the rocky ridges and moraines, trying to avoid the crevassed glaciers, and all went well until the twentieth, when just as we were reaching the steeper gradients a strong wind sprang up, blowing straight down the course before us.

All day long we toiled against it, but the weather grew worse, with gusts of sleet and snow, until the wind reached the force of a hurricane and the temperature fell to 28 degrees below zero.

There was nothing to do but to wait for the blizzard to blow itself out, so we plugged down our tents in the shelter of the rocky side of a ravine that had an immense snow-field behind it.

The first night was bad enough, for the canvas of one tent flew into ribbons, and the poor chaps in it had to lie uncovered in their half-frozen sleeping-bags until morning.

All through the twenty-first, twenty-second, and twenty-third the storm continued, sweeping with terrific force down the ravine, and whirling the snow in dense masses from the snow-field overhead.

Christmas Eve was worse, with the temperature down to 38 degrees below zero and the wind up to eighty miles an hour in gusts, and during the greater part of Christmas Day we were all confined to our sleeping-bags and half buried in the snow that had drifted in on us.

As a consequence we had no religious service, and if anybody said a De Profundis it was between his crackling lips under his frozen beard. We had no Christmas dinner either, except a few Plasmon biscuits and a nip of brandy and water, which were served out by good old O'Sullivan, who had come with me as doctor to the expedition.

On St. Stephen's Day I made a round of the camp and found the ponies suffering terribly and the dogs badly hit. The storm was telling on the men too, for some of them were down with dysentery, and the toes of one poor chap were black from frostbite.

I was fit enough myself, thank God, but suffering from want of sleep or rather from a restless feeling which broken sleep brought with it.

The real truth is that never since I sailed had I been able to shake off the backward thought that I ought not to have left my dear one behind me. In active work, like the gale, I could dismiss the idea of her danger; but now that I had nothing to do but to lie like a log in a sleeping-bag, I suffered terribly from my recollection of her self-sacrifice and my fear of the consequences that might come of it.

This was not so bad in the daytime, for even in the midst of the whirling snow and roaring wind I had only to close my eyes, and I could see her as she came up the road in the sunshine that Sunday morning when she was returning from church in her drooping hat and fluttering veil, or as she looked at me with her great "seeing eyes" at the last moment of all when she compelled me to come away.

But the night was the devil. No sooner did I drop off to sleep than I awoke with a start at the sound of her voice calling me by my name.

"Martin! Martin!"

It was always a voice of distress, and though I am no dreamer and I think no crank, I could not get away from the idea that she was crying to me to come back.

That was about the one thing in the world that was impossible to me now, and yet I knew that getting assurance from somewhere that my dear one was being cared for was the only way to set my mind at rest for the job that was before me.

It may seem ridiculous that I should have thought of that, but everybody who has ever been with Nature in her mighty solitudes, aloof from the tides of life, knows that the soul of man is susceptible down there to signs which would seem childish amid the noise and bustle of the world.

It was like that with me.

I shared my tent with O'Sullivan, the chief of our scientific staff, and Treacle, who thought it his duty to take care of me, though the work was generally the other way about.

The old salt had been badly battered, and I had not liked the way he had been mumbling about "mother," which is not a good sign in a stalwart chap when his strength is getting low.

So while buttoning up the tent on the night after Christmas Day I was a bit touched up to see old Treacle, who had lived the life of a rip, fumbling at his breast and hauling something out with an effort.

It was a wooden image of the Virgin (about the length of my hand) daubed over with gilt and blue paint, and when he stuck it up in front of his face as he lay in his sleeping-bag, I knew that he expected to go out before morning, and wished *that* to be the last thing his old eyes should rest on.

I am not much of a man for saints myself (having found that we get out of tight places middling well without them), but perhaps what Treacle did got down into some secret place of my soul, for I felt calmer as I fell asleep, and when I awoke it was not from the sound of my darling's voice, but from a sort of deafening silence.

The roaring of the wind had ceased; the blizzard was over; the lamp that hung from the staff of the tent had gone out; and there was a sheet of light coming in from an aperture in the canvas.

It was the midnight sun of the Antarctic, and when I raised my head I saw that it fell full on the little gilded image of the Virgin. Anybody who has never been where I was then may laugh if he likes and welcome, but that was enough for me. It was all right! Somebody was looking after my dear one!

I shouted to my shipmates to get up and make ready, and at dawn, when we started afresh on our journey, there may have been dark clouds over our heads but the sun was shining inside of us. M. C.

[END OF MARTIN CONRAD'S MEMORANDUM]

EIGHTY-FOURTH CHAPTER

SISTER MILDRED was right. Our Blessed Lady must have interceded for me, because help came immediately.

I awoke on St. Stephen's morning with that thrilling emotion which every mother knows to be the first real and certain consciousness of motherhood.

It is not for me to describe the physical effects of that great change. But the spiritual effect is another matter. It was like that of a miracle. God in His great mercy, looking down on me in my sorrow, had sent one of His ministering angels to comfort me.

It seemed to say:

"Don't be afraid. He who went away is not lost to you. Something of himself is about to return."

I felt no longer that I was to be left alone in my prison-house of London, because Martin's child was to bear me company—to be a link between us, an everlasting bond, so that he and I should be together to the end.

I tremble to say what interpretation I put upon all this—how it seemed to be a justification of what I did on the night before Martin left Ellan, as if God, knowing he would not return, had prompted me, so that when my dark hour came I might have this great hope for my comforter.

And oh how wonderful it was, how strange, how mysterious, how joyful!

Every day and all day and always I was conscious of my unborn child, as a fluttering bird held captive in the hand. The mystery and the joy of the coming life soothed away my sorrow, and if I had shed any tears they would have dried them.

And then the future!

I seemed to know from the first that it was to be a girl, and already I could see her face and look into her sea-blue eyes. As she grew up I would talk to her of her father—the brave explorer, the man of destiny, who laid down his life in a great work for the world. We should always be talking of him—we two alone together, because he belonged to us and nobody else in the world besides. Everything I have written here I should tell her—at least the beautiful part of it, the part about our love, which nothing in life, and not even death itself, could quench.

Oh the joy of those days! It may seem strange that I should have been so happy so soon after my bereavement, but I cannot help it if it was so, and it *was* so.

Perhaps it was a sort of hysteria, due to the great change in my physical condition. I do not know. I do not think I want to know. But one thing is sure—that hope and prayer and the desire of life awoke in me again, as by the touch of God's own hand, and I became another and a happier woman.

Such was the condition in which Mildred found me when she returned a few days later. Then she brought me down plump to material matters. We had first to consider the questions of ways and means, in order to find out how to face the future.

It was the beginning of January, my appointed time was in June, and I had only some sixteen pounds of my money left, so it was clear that I could not stay in the boarding-house much longer.

Happily Mildred knew of homes where women could live inexpensively during their period of waiting. They were partly philanthropic and therefore subject to certain regulations, which my resolute determination (not to mention Martin's name, or permit it to be mentioned) might make it difficult for me to observe, but Mildred hoped to find one that would take me on her recommendation without asking further question.

In this expectation we set out in search of a Maternity Home. What a day of trial we had! I shall never forget it.

The first home we called at was a Catholic one in the neighbourhood of our boarding-house.

It had the appearance of a convent, and that pleased me exceedingly. After we had passed the broad street door, with its large brass plate and small brass grille, we were shown into a little waiting-room with tiled floor, distempered walls, and coloured pictures of the saints.

The porteress told us the Mother was at prayers with the inmates, but would come downstairs presently, and while we waited we heard the dull hum of voices, the playing of an organ, and the singing of the sweet music I knew so well.

Closing my eyes I felt myself back in Rome, and began to pray that I might be permitted to remain there. But the desire was damped when the Mother entered the room.

She was a stout woman, wearing heavy outdoor boots and carrying her arms interlaced before her, with the hands hidden in the ample sleeves of her habit, and her face was so white and expressionless, that it might have been cast in plaster of Paris.

In a rather nervous voice Mildred explained our errand.

"Mother," she said, "I cannot tell you anything about this young lady, and I have come to ask if you will take her on my recommendation."

"My dear child," said the Mother, "that would be utterly against our rule. Not to know who the young lady is, where she comes from, why she is here, and whether she is married or single or a widow—it is quite impossible."

Mildred, looking confused and ashamed, said:

"She can afford to pay a little."

"That makes no difference."

"But I thought that in exceptional cases . . ."

"There can be no exceptional cases, Sister. If the young lady is married and can say that her husband consents, or single and can give us assurance that her father or guardian agrees, or a widow and can offer satisfactory references . . ."

Mildred looked across at me, but I shook my head.

"In that case there seems to be nothing more to say," said the Mother, and rising without ceremony she walked with us to the door.

Our next call was at the headquarters of a home which was neither Catholic nor Protestant, but belonged, Mildred said, to a kind of Universal Church, admitting inmates of all denominations.

It was in a busy thoroughfare and had the appearance of a business office. After Mildred had written her name and the object of our visit on a slip of paper we were taken up in a lift to another office with an open safe, where a man in a kind of uniform (called a Commissioner) was signing letters and cheques.

The Commissioner was at first very courteous, especially to me, and I had an uncomfortable feeling that he was mistaking me for something quite other than I was until Mildred explained our errand, and then his manner changed painfully.

"What you ask is against all our regulations," he said. "Secrecy implies something to hide, and we neither hide anything nor permit anything to be hidden. In fact our system requires that we should not only help the woman, but punish the man by making him realise his legal, moral, and religious liability for his wrong-doing. Naturally we can only do this by help of the girl, and if she does not tell us at the outset who and what the partner of her sin has been and where he is to be found . . ."

I was choking with shame and indignation, and rising to my feet I said to Mildred:

"Let us go, please."

"Ah, yes, I know," said the Commissioner, with a superior smile, "I have seen all this before. The girl nearly always tries to shield the guilty man. But why should she? It may seem generous, but it is really wicked. It is a direct means of increasing immorality. The girl who protects the author of her downfall is really promoting the ruin of another woman, and if . . ."

Thinking of Martin I wanted to strike the smug Pharisee in the face, and in order to conquer that unwomanly impulse I hurried out of the office, and into the street, leaving poor Mildred to follow me.

Our last call was at the home of a private society in a little brick house that seemed to lean against the wall of a large lying-in hospital in the West End of London.

At the moment of our arrival the Matron was presiding in the drawing-room over a meeting of a Missionary League for the Conversion of the Jews, so we were taken through a narrow lobby into a little back-parlour which overlooked, through a glass screen, a large apartment, wherein a number of young women, who had the appearance of dressmakers, ladies' maids, and governesses, were sewing tiny pieces of linen and flannel that were obviously baby-clothes.

There were no carpets on the floors and the house had a slight smell of carbolic. The tick-tick of sewing machines on the other side of the screen mingled with the deadened sound of the clapping of hands in the room overhead.

After a while there was rustle of dresses coming down the bare stairs, followed by the opening and closing of the front door, and then the Matron came into the parlour.

She was a very tall, flat-bosomed woman in a plain black dress, and she seemed to take in our situation instantly. Without waiting for Mildred's explanation she began to ask my name, my age, and where I came from.

Mildred fenced these questions as well as she could, and then, with even more nervousness than ever, made the same request as before.

The Matron seemed aghast.

"Most certainly not," she said. "My committee would never dream of such a thing. In the interests of the unfortunate girls who have fallen from the path of virtue, as well as their still more unfortunate offspring, we always make the most searching inquiries. In fact, we keep a record of every detail of every case. Listen to this," she added, and opening a large leather-bound book like a ledger, she began to read one of its entries:

"*H. J., aged eighteen years, born of very respectable parents, was led astray* [that was not the word] *in a lonely road very late at night by a sailor who was never afterwards heard of . . .*"

But I could bear no more, and rising from my seat I fled from the room and the house into the noisy street outside.

All day long my whole soul had been in revolt. It seemed to me that, while God in His gracious mercy was giving me my child to comfort and console me, to uplift and purify me, and make me a better woman than I had been before, man, with his false and cruel morality, with his machine-made philanthropy, was trying to use it as a whip to punish not only me but Martin.

But that it should never do! Never as long as I lived! I would die in the streets first!

Perhaps I was wrong, and did not understand myself, and certainly Mildred did not understand me. When she rejoined me in the street we turned our faces homeward and were half way back to the boarding-house before we spoke again.

Then she said:

"I am afraid the other institutions will be the same. They'll all want references."

I answered that they should never get them.

"But your money will be done soon, my child, and then what is to become of you?"

"No matter!" I said, for I had already determined to face the world myself without help from anybody.

There was a silence again until we reached the door of our boarding-house, and then Mildred said:

"Mary, your father is a rich man, and however much you may have displeased him he cannot wish you to be left to the mercy of the world—especially when your time comes. Let me write to him . . ."

That terrified me, for I saw only one result—an open quarrel between my father and my husband about the legitimacy of my child, who would probably be taken away from me as soon as it was born.

So taking Mildred by the arm, regardless of the observation of passers-by, I begged and prayed and implored of her not to write to my father.

She promised not to do so, and we parted on good terms; but I was not satisfied, and the only result of our day's journeying was that I became possessed of the idea that the whole world was conspiring to rob me of my unborn child.

A few days later Mildred called again, and then she said:

"I had another letter from Father Donovan this morning, Mary. Your poor priest is broken-hearted about you. He is sure you are in London, and certain you are in distress, and says that with or without his Bishop's consent he is coming up to London to look for you, and will never go back until you are found."

I began to suspect Mildred. In the fever of my dread of losing my child I convinced myself that with the best intentions in the world, merely out of love for me and pity for my position, she would give me up—perhaps in the very hour of my peril.

To make this impossible I determined to cut myself off from her and everybody else, by leaving the boarding-house and taking another and cheaper lodging far enough away.

I was encouraged in this course by the thought of my diminishing resources, and though heaven knows I had not too many comforts where I was, I reproached myself for spending so much on my own needs when I ought to be economising for the coming of my child.

The end of it all was that one morning early I went down to the corner of Oxford Street where the motor-omnibuses seem to come and go from all parts of London.

North, south, east, and west were all one to me, leading to labyrinths of confused and interminable streets, and I knew as little as a child which of them was best for my purpose. But chance seems to play the greatest part in our lives, and at that moment it was so with me.

I was standing on the edge of the pavement when a motor-bus labelled "Bayswater Road" stopped immediately in front of me and I stepped into it, not knowing in the least why I did so.

Late that evening, having found what I wanted, I returned in the mingled mist and darkness to the boarding-house to pack up my belongings. That was not difficult to do, and after settling my account and sending young John for a cab I was making for the door when the landlady came up to me.

"Will you not leave your new address, my dear, lest anybody should call," she said.

"Nobody will call," I answered.

"But in case there should be letters?"

"There will be no letters," I said, and whispering to the driver to drive up Oxford Street, I got into the cab.

It was then quite dark. The streets and shops were alight, and I remembered that as I crossed the top of the Charing Cross Road I looked down in the direction of the lofty building in which Mildred's window would be shining like a lighthouse over Piccadilly.

Poor dear ill-requited Mildred! She has long ago forgiven me. She knows now that when I ran away from the only friend I had in London it was because I could not help it.

She knows, too, that I was not thinking of myself, and that in diving still deeper into the dungeon of the great city, in hiding and burying myself away in it, I was asking nothing of God but that He would let me live the rest of my life—no matter how poor and lonely—with the child that He was sending to be a living link between my lost one and me.

In the light of what happened afterwards, that was all so strange, and oh, so wonderful and miraculous!

EIGHTY-FIFTH CHAPTER

My new quarters were in the poorer district which stands at the back of Bayswater.

The street was a cul-de-sac (of some ten small houses on either side) which was blocked up at the further end by the high wall of a factory for the "humanization" of milk, and opened out of a busy thoroughfare of interior shops like a gully-way off a noisy coast.

My home in this street was in number one, and I had been attracted to it by a printed card in the semi-circular fan-light over the front door, saying: "A Room to Let Furnished."

My room, which was of fair size, was on the first floor and had two windows to the street, with yellow holland blinds and white muslin curtains.

The furniture consisted of a large bed, a horse-hair sofa, three cane-bottomed chairs, a chest of drawers (which stood between the windows), and a mirror over the mantelpiece, which had pink paper, cut into fanciful patterns, over the gilt frame, to keep off the flies.

The floor was covered with linoleum, but there were two strips of carpet, one before the fire and the other by the bed; the walls were papered with a bright red paper representing peonies in bloom; and there were three pictures—a portrait of a great Welsh preacher with a bardic name ("Dyfed"), an engraving entitled "Feed my Sheep" (showing Jesus carrying a lamb), and a memorial card of some member of the family of the house, in the form of a tomb with a weeping angel on either side.

I paid five shilling a week for my room, and, as this included the use of kettle, cooking utensils, and crockery, I found to my great delight at the end of the first week that providing for myself (tea, bread and butter, and eggs being my principal food) I had only spent ten shillings altogether, which, according to my present needs, left me enough for my time of waiting and several weeks beyond.

Every morning I went out with a little hand-bag to buy my provisions in the front street; and every afternoon I took a walk in the better part of Bayswater and even into the Park (Hyde Park), which was not far off, but never near Piccadilly, or so far east as Bloomsbury, lest I should meet Sister Mildred or be recognized by the old boarders.

I had no key to my lodgings, but when I returned home I knocked at the front door (which was at the top of a short flight of steps from the pavement) and then a string was pulled in the cellar-kitchen in which the family of my landlady lived, whereupon the bolt was shot back and the door opened of itself.

Finding it necessary to account for myself here as at the boarding-house, I had adhered to my former name, but said I was the widow of a commander lately lost at sea, which was as near to the truth as I dared venture.

I had also made no disguise of the fact that I was expecting a child, a circumstance which secured me much sympathy from the kind-hearted souls who were now my neighbours.

They were all womanly women, generally the wives of men working in the milk factory, and therefore the life of our street was very regular.

At five in the morning you heard the halting step of the old "knocker up," who went up and down the street tapping at the bedroom windows with a long pole like a fishing-rod. A little before six you heard the clashing of many front doors and the echoing footsteps of the men going to their work. At half-past seven you heard the whoop of the milkman and the rattling of his cans. At half-past eight you heard the little feet of the children, like the pattering of rain, going off to the Board School round the corner. And a little after four in the afternoon you heard the wild cries of the juvenile community let loose from lessons, the boys trundling iron hoops and the girls skipping to a measured tune over a rope stretched from parapet to parapet.

After that, our street hummed like a bee-hive, with the women, washed and combed, standing knitting at their open doors or exchanging confidences across the areas until darkness fell and each of the mothers called her children into bed, as an old hen in the farmyard clucks up her chickens.

These good creatures were very kind to me. Having satisfied themselves from observation of my habits that I was "respectable," they called me "our lady"; and I could not help hearing that I was "a nice young thing," though it was a little against me that I did not go to church or chapel, and had confessed to being a Catholic—for several of our families (including that of my landlady) were members of the Welsh Zion Chapel not far away.

Such was the life of the little human cage to which I had confined myself, but I had an inner life that was all my own and very sweet to me.

During the long hours of every day in which I was alone I occupied myself in the making of clothes for my baby—buying linen and flannel and worsted, and borrowing patterns from my Welsh landlady.

This stimulated my tenderness towards the child that was to come, for the heart of a young mother is almost infantile, and I hardly know whether to laugh or cry when I think of the childish things I did and thought and said to myself in those first days when I was alone in my room in that back street in Bayswater.

Thus long before baby was born I had christened her. At first I wished to call her Mary, not because I cared for that name myself, but because Martin had said it was the most beautiful in the world. In the end, however, I called her Isabel Mary (because Isabel was my mother's name and she had been a far better woman than I was), and as I finished my baby's garments one by one I used to put them away in their drawer, saying to myself, "That's Isabel Mary's binder," or "Isabel Mary's christening-robe" as the case might be.

I dare say it was all very foolish. There are tears in my eyes when I think of it now, but there were none then, for though there were moments when, remembering Martin, I felt as if life were for ever blank, I was almost happy in my poor surroundings, and if it was a cage I had fixed myself in there was always a bird singing inside of it—the bird that sang in my own bosom.

"When Isabel Mary comes everything will be all right," I used to think.

This went on for many weeks and perhaps it might have gone on until my time was full but for something which, occurring under my eyes, made me tremble with the fear that the life I was living and the hope I was cherishing were really very wrong and selfish.

Of my landlady, Mrs. Williams, I saw little. She was a rather hard but no doubt heavily-laden woman, who had to "do" for a swarm of children, besides two young men lodgers who lived in the kitchen and slept in the room behind mine. Her husband was a quiet man (a carter at the dairy) whom I never saw at all except on the staircase at ten o'clock at night, when, after winding the tall clock on the landing, he went upstairs to bed in his stocking feet.

But the outstanding member of the family for me was a shock-headed girl of fourteen called Emmerjane, which was a running version of Emma Jane.

I understood that Emmerjane was the illegitimate daughter of Mrs. Williams's dead sister, and that she had been born in Carnarvon, which still shimmered in her memory in purple and gold.

Emmerjane was the drudge of the family, and I first saw her in the street at dusk, mothering a brood of her little cousins, taking Hughie by one hand and Katie by the other and telling Gwennie to lay hold of Davie lest he should be run over by the milk vans.

Afterwards she became my drudge also—washing my floor, bringing up my coals, and cleaning my grate, for sixpence a week, and giving me a great deal of information about my neighbours for nothing.

Thus she told me, speaking broad cockney with a Welsh accent, that the people opposite were named Wagstaffe and that the creaking noise I heard was that of a mangle, which Mrs. Wagstaffe had to keep because her husband was a drunkard, who stole her money and came home "a-Saturday nights, when the public-houses turned out, and beat her somethink shockin'," though she always forgave him the next day and then the creaking went on as before.

But the greatest interest of this weird little woman, who had a premature knowledge of things a child ought not to know, was in a house half-way down the street on the other side, where steam was always coming from the open door to the front kitchen.

The people who lived there were named Jones. Mrs. Jones "washed" and had a bed-ridden old mother (with two shillings from the Guardians) and a daughter named Maggie.

Maggie Jones, who was eighteen, and very pretty, used to work in the dairy, but the foreman had "tiken advantage of her" and she had just had a baby.

This foreman was named Owen Owens and he lived at the last number on our side, where two unmarried sisters "kept house" for him and sat in the "singing seat" at Zion.

Maggie thought it was the sisters' fault that Owen Owens did not marry her, so she conceived a great scheme for "besting" them, and this was the tragedy which, through Emmerjane's quick little eyes and her cockney-Welsh tongue, came to me in instalments day by day.

When her baby was a month old Maggie dressed it up "fine" and took it to the photographers for its "card di visit." The photographs were a long time coming, but when they came they were "heavenly lovely" and Maggie "cried to look at them."

Then she put one in an envelope and addressed it to Owen Owens, and though it had only to cross the street, she went out after dark to a pillar-box a long way off lest anybody should see her posting it.

Next day she said, "He'll have it now, for he always comes home to dinner. He'll take it up to his bedroom, look you, and stand it on the washstand, and if either of those sisters touch it he'll give them what's what."

After that she waited anxiously for an acknowledgment, and every time the postman passed down our street her pretty pale face would be at the door, saying, "Anything for me to-day?" or "Are you *sure* there's nothing for me, postman?"

At length a letter came, and Maggie Jones trembled so much that she dared not open it, but at last she tripped up to her room to be "all of herself," and then . . . then there was a "wild screech," and when Emmerjane ran upstairs Maggie was stretched out on the floor in a dead faint, clutching in her tight hand the photograph which Owen Owens had returned with the words, written in his heavy scrawl across the face—*Maggie Jones's bastard.*

It would be impossible to say how this incident affected me. I felt as if a moral earthquake had opened under my feet.

What had I been doing? In looking forward to the child that was to come to me I had been thinking only of my own comfort—my own consolation.

But what about the child itself?

If my identity ever became known—and it might at any moment, by the casual recognition of a person in the street—how should the position of my child differ from that of this poor girl?

A being born out of the pale of the law, as my husband would say it must be, an outcast, a thing of shame, without a father to recognise it, and with its mother's sin to lash its back for ever!

When I thought of that, much as I had longed for the child that was to be a living link between Martin and me, I asked myself if I had any right to wish for it.

I felt I had no right, and that considering my helpless position the only true motherly love was to pray that my baby might be still-born.

But that was too hard. It was too terrible. It was like a second bereavement. I could not and would not do it.

"Never, never, never!" I told myself.

EIGHTY-SIXTH CHAPTER

THINKING matters out in the light of Maggie Jones's story, I concluded that poverty was at the root of nearly everything. If I could stave off poverty no real harm could come to my child.

I determined to do so. But there was only one way open to me at present—and that was to retrench my expenses.

I did retrench them. Persuading myself that I had no real need of this and that, I reduced my weekly outlay.

This gave me immense pleasure, and even when I saw, after a while, that I was growing thin and pale, I felt no self-pity of any sort, remembering that I had nobody to look well for now, and only the sweet and glorious duty before me of providing for my child.

I convinced myself, too, that my altered appearance was natural to my condition, and that all I needed was fresh air and exercise, therefore I determined to walk every day in the Park.

I did so once only.

It was one of those lovely mornings in early spring, when the air and the sky of London, after the long fog and grime of winter, seem to be washed by showers of sunshine.

I had entered by a gate to a broad avenue and was resting (for I was rather tired) on a seat under a chestnut tree whose glistening sheaths were swelling and breaking into leaf, when I saw a number of ladies and gentlemen on horseback coming in my direction.

I recognised one of them instantly. It was Mr. Vivian, and a beautiful girl was riding beside him. My heart stood still, for I thought he would see me. But he was too much occupied with his companion to do so.

"Yes, by Jove, it's killing, isn't it?" he said, in his shrill voice, and with his monocle in his mole-like eye, he rode past me, laughing.

After that I took my walks in the poorer streets behind Bayswater, but there I was forced back on my old problem, for I seemed to be always seeing the sufferings of children.

Thank God, children as a whole are happy. They seem to live in their hearts alone, and I really and truly believe that if all the doors of the rich houses of the West End of London were thrown open to the poor children of the East End they would stay in their slums and alleys.

But some of them suffer there for all that, especially the unfortunate ones who enter the world without any legal right to be here, and I seemed to be coming upon that kind everywhere.

One evening I saw a tiny boy of five sheltering from the rain under a dripping and draughty railway arch, and crying as if his little heart would break. I tried to comfort him and could not, but when a rather shame-faced young woman came along, as if returning from her work, he burst out on her and cried:

''Oh, muvver, she's been a-beating of me awrful.''

''Never mind, Johnny,'' said the young woman, kneeling on the wet pavement to dry the child's eyes. ''Don't cry, that's a good boy.''

It needed no second sight to look into the heart of that tragedy, and the effect of it upon me was to make me curtail my expenditure still further.

Looking back on those days I cannot but wonder that I never tried to find employment. But there was one delicate impediment then—my condition, which was becoming visible, I thought, to people in the street, and causing some of them, especially women, to look round at me. When this became painful I discontinued my walks altogether, and sent Emmerjane on my few errands.

Then my room became my world.

I do not think I ever saw a newspaper. And knowing nothing of what was going on, beyond the surge and swell of the life of London as it came to me when I opened my window, I had now, more than ever, the sense of living in a dungeon on a rock in the middle of the sea.

Having no exercise I ate less and less. But I found a certain joy in that, for I was becoming a miser for my child's sake, and the only pain I suffered was when I went to my drawer, as I did every day, and looked at my rapidly diminishing store.

I knew that my Welsh landlady was beginning to call me *close,* meaning mean; but that did not trouble me in the least, because I told myself that every penny I saved out of my own expenses was for my child, to keep her from poverty and all the evils and injustices that followed in its train.

As my appointed time drew near my sleep was much broken; and sometimes in the middle of the night, when I heard a solitary footstep going down the street I would get up, draw aside one of my blinds, and see a light burning in some bedroom window opposite, and afterwards hear the muffled cry of the small new being who had come as another immigrant into our chill little world.

But I made no arrangements for myself until my Welsh landlady came up to my room one day and asked if I had settled with a doctor. When I answered no, she held up her hands and cried:

"Good gracious! Just as I thought. Thee'st got to lose no time, though."

Happily there was a doctor in our street nearly every day, and if I wished it she would call him up to me. I agreed and the doctor came next morning.

He was a tall, elderly man with cold eyes, compressed lips, and a sour expression, and neither his manner nor his speech gave any hint of a consciousness (which I am sure every true doctor must have) that in coming to a woman in my condition he was entering one of the sacred chambers of human life.

He asked me a few abrupt questions, told me when he would come again, and then spoke about his fee.

"My fee is a guinea and I usually get it in advance," he said, whereupon I went to my drawer, and took out a sovereign and a shilling, not without a certain pang at seeing so much go in a moment after I had been saving so long.

The doctor had dropped the money into his waistcoat pocket with oh! such a casual air, and was turning to go, when my Welsh landlady said:

"Her's not doing herself justice in the matter of food, doctor."

"Why, what do you eat?" asked the doctor, and as well as I could, out of my dry and parched throat, I told him.

"Tut! tut! This will never do," he said. "It's your duty to your child to have better food than that. Something light and nourishing every day, such as poultry, fish, chicken broth, beef-tea, and farinaceous foods generally."

I gasped. What was the doctor thinking about?

"Remember," he said, with his finger up, "the health of the child is intimately dependent on the health of the mother.

When the mother is in a morbid state it affects the composition of the blood, and does great harm to the health of the offspring, both immediately and in after life. Don't forget now. Good day!"

That was a terrible shock to me. In my great ignorance and great love I had been depriving myself for the sake of my child, and now I learned that I had all the time been doing it a grave and perhaps life-long injury!

Trying to make amends I sent out for some of the expensive foods the doctor had ordered me, but when they were cooked I found to my dismay that I had lost the power of digesting them.

My pain at this discovery was not lessened next day when my Welsh landlady brought up a nurse whom I had asked her to engage for me.

The woman was a human dumpling with a discordant voice, and her first interest, like that of the doctor, seemed to centre in her fee.

She told me that her usual terms were a guinea for the fortnight, but when she saw my face fall (for I could not help thinking how little I had left) she said:

"Some ladies don't need a fortnight, though. Mrs. Wagstaffe, for instance, she never has no more than five days, and on the sixth she's back at her mangle. So if five will do, ma'am, perhaps ten and six won't hurt you."

I agreed, and the nurse was rolling her ample person out of my room when my Welsh landlady said:

"But her's not eating enough to keep a linnet, look you."

And then my nurse, who was what the doctor calls a croaker, began on a long series of stories of ladies who, having "let themselves down" had died, either at childbirth or soon afterwards.

"It's *after* a lady feels it if she has to nurse her baby," said the nurse, "and I couldn't be responsible neither for you nor the child if you don't do yourself justice."

This was a still more terrible possibility—the possibility that I might die and leave my child behind me. The thought haunted me all that day and the following night, but the climax came next morning, when Emmerjane, while blackleading my grate, gave me the last news of Maggie Jones.

Maggie's mother had been "a-naggin' of her to get work," asking if she had not enough mouths to feed "without her bringin' another."

Maggie had at first been afraid to look for employment, thinking everybody knew of her trouble. But after her mother had put the young minister from Zion on to her to tell her to be ''obejent'' she had gone out every day, whether the weather was good or bad or ''mejum.''

This had gone on for three months (during which Maggie used to stay out late because she was afraid to meet her mother's face) until one wet night, less than a week ago, she had come home drenched to the skin, taken to her bed, ''sickened for somethink'' and died.

Three days after Emmerjane told me this story a great solemnity fell on our street.

It was Saturday, when the children do not go to school, but, playing no games, they gathered in whispering groups round the house with the drawn blinds, while their mothers stood bareheaded at the doors with their arms under their aprons and their hidden hands over their mouths.

I tried not to know what was going on, but looking out at the last moment I saw Maggie Jones's mother, dressed in black, coming down her steps, with her eyes very red and her hard face (which was seamed with labour) all wet and broken up.

The ''young minister'' followed (a beardless boy who could have known nothing of the tragedy of a woman's life), and stepping into the midst of the group of the congregation from Zion, who had gathered there with their warm Welsh hearts full of pity for the dead girl, he gave out a Welsh hymn, and they sang it in the London street, just as they had been used to do at the cottage doors in the midst of their native mountains:

''Bydd myrdd o ryfeddodau
Ar doriad boreu wawr.''

I could look no longer, so I turned back into my room, but at the next moment I heard the rumble of wheels and knew that Maggie Jones was on her way to her last mother of all—the Earth.

During the rest of that day I could think of nothing but Maggie's child, and what was to become of it, and next morning when Emmerjane came up she told me that the ''young minister'' was ''a-gettin' it into the 'ouse.''

I think that was the last straw of my burden, for my mind came back with a swift rebound from Maggie Jones's child to my own.

The thought of leaving my baby behind now terrified and appalled me. It brought me no comfort to think that though I was poor my father was rich, for I knew that if he ever came to know of my child's existence he would hate it and cast it off, as the central cause of the downfall of his plans.

Yet Martin's child alone, and at the mercy of the world! It could not and must not be!

Then came a fearful thought. I fought against it. I said many "Hail Marys" to protect myself from it. But I could not put it away.

Perhaps my physical condition was partly to blame. Others must judge of that. It is only for me to say, in all truth and sincerity, what I felt and thought when I stood (as every woman who is to be a mother must) at the door of that dark chamber which is Life's greatest mystery.

I thought of how Martin had been taken from me, as Fate (perhaps for some good purpose still unrevealed) had led me to believe.

I thought of how I had comforted myself with the hope of the child that was coming to be a link between us.

I thought of the sweet hours I had spent in making my baby's clothes; in choosing her name; in whispering it to myself, yes, and to God, too, every night and every morning.

I thought of how day by day I had trimmed the little lamp I kept burning in the sanctuary within my breast where my baby and I lived together.

I thought of how this had taken the sting out of death and victory out of the grave. And after that I told myself that, however sweet and beautiful, *all this had been selfishness and I must put it away.*

Then I thought of the child itself, who—conceived in sin as my Church would say, disinherited by the law, outlawed by society, inheriting my physical weaknesses, having lost one of its parents and being liable to lose the other—was now in danger of being left to the mercies of the world, banned from its birth, penniless and without a protector, to become a drudge and an outcast or even a thief, a gambler, or a harlot.

This was what I thought and felt.

And when at last I knew that I had come to the end of my appointed time I knelt down in my sad room, and if ever I prayed a fervent prayer, if ever my soul went up to God in passionate supplication, it was that the child I had longed for and looked forward to as a living link with my lost one *might be born dead.*

"Oh God, whatever happens to me, let my baby be born dead—I pray, I beseech Thee."

Perhaps it was a wicked prayer. God knows. He will be just.

EIGHTY-SEVENTH CHAPTER

It was Saturday, the seventh of June. The summer had been a cold one thus far; the night was chill and heavy rain was beating against the window-pane.

There was a warm fire in my room for the first time for several months; the single gas jet on the window side of the mantelpiece had been turned low, and the nurse, in list slippers, was taking my little flannel and linen garments out of the chest of drawers and laying them on the flat steel fender.

I think I must have had intervals of insensibility, for the moments of consciousness came and went with me, like the diving and rising of a sea-bird in the midst of swelling waves.

At one such moment I became aware that the doctor and my Welsh landlady, as well as my nurse, were in the room, and that they were waiting for the crisis and fearing for my life.

I heard them talking in low voices which made a drumming noise in my ears, like that which the sea makes when it is rolling into a cave.

"She's let herself down so low, pore thing, that I don't know in the world what's to happen to her."

"As God is my witness, look you, I never saw anybody live on so little."

"I'm not afraid of the mother. I'm more afraid of the child, if you ask me."

Then the drumming noise would die out, and I would only hear something within myself saying:

"Oh God, oh God, that my child may be born dead."

At another moment I heard, above the rattle of the rain, the creaking of the mangle in the cellar-kitchen on the other side of the street.

At still another moment I heard the sound of quarrelling in the house opposite. A woman was screaming, children were shrieking, and a man was swearing in a thick hoarse voice.

I knew what had happened—it was midnight, the "public-houses had turned out," and Mr. Wagstaffe had come home drunk.

The night passed heavily. I heard myself (as I had done before) calling on Martin in a voice of wild entreaty:

"Martin! Martin!"

Then remembering that he was gone I began again to pray. I heard myself praying to the Blessed Virgin:

"Oh, Mother of my God, let my child . . ."

But a voice which seemed to come from far away interrupted me.

"Hush, bâch, hush! It will make it harder for thee."

At length peace came. It seemed to me that I was running out of a tempestuous sea, with its unlimited loneliness and cruel depth, into a quiet harbour.

There was a heavenly calm, in which I could hear the doctor and the nurse and my Welsh landlady talking together in cheerful whispers.

I knew that everything was over, and with the memory of the storm I had passed through still in my heart and brain, I said:

"Is it dead?"

"Dead?" cried the nurse in a voice several octaves higher than usual. "Dear heart no, but alive and well. A beautiful little girl!"

"Yes, your baby is all right, ma'am," said the doctor, and then my Welsh landlady cried:

"Why did'st think it would be dead, bach? As I am a Christian woman thee'st got the beautifullest baby that ever breathed."

I could bear no more. The dark thoughts of the days before were over me still, and with a groan I turned to the wall. Then everything was wiped out as by an angel's wing, and I fell into a deep sleep.

When I awoke my dark thoughts were vanishing away like a bad dream in the morning. The rain had ceased, the gas had been put out, and I could see by the glow on the peonies of the wall-paper that the sun was shining with a soft red light through the holland blinds of my windows.

I heard the sparrows chirping on the sills outside; I heard the milkman rattling his cans; I heard the bells of a neighbouring church ringing for early communion.

I closed my eyes and held my breath and listened to the sounds in my own room. I heard the kettle singing over the fire; I heard somebody humming softly, and beating a foot on the floor in time to the tune: and then I heard a low voice (it was Emmerjane's) saying from somewhere near my bed:

"I dunno but what she's awake. Her breathing ain't a-goin' now."

Then I turned and saw the nurse sitting before the fire with something on her lap. I knew what it was. It was my child, and it was asleep. In spite of my dark thoughts my heart yearned for it.

And then came the great miracle.

My child awoke and began to cry. It was a faint cry, oh! so thin and weak, but it went thundering and thundering through me. There was a moment of awful struggle, and then a mighty torrent of love swept over me.

It was Motherhood.

My child! Mine! Flesh of my flesh! Oh God! Oh God!

All my desire for my baby's death to save it from the pains of life was gone, and my heart, starved so long, throbbed with tenderness. I raised myself in bed, in spite of my nurse's protest, and cried to her to give me my baby.

"Give her to me. Give her to me."

"By-and-by, by-and-by," said the nurse.

"Now, now! I can wait no longer."

"But you must take some food first. Emmerjane, give her that glass of milk and water."

I drank the milk just to satisfy them, and then held out my arms for my child.

"Give her to me—quick, quick!"

"Here she is then, the jewel!"

Oh! the joy of that moment when I first took my baby in my arms, and looked into her face, and saw my own features and the sea-blue eyes of Martin! Oh the rapture of my first eager kiss!

I suppose I must have been rough with my little cherub in the fervour of my love, for she began to cry again.

"There! there!" said the nurse. "Be good now, or I must take baby away."

But heaven had taught me another lesson, and instantly, instinctively, I put my baby to my breast. Instantly and instinctively, too, my baby turned to it with its little mouth open and its little fingers feeling for the place.

"Oh God! My God! Oh Mother of my God!"

And then in that happiness that is beyond all earthly bliss—the happiness of a mother when she first clasps her baby to her breast—I began to cry.

I had not cried for months—not since that night in Ellan which I did not wish to remember any more—but now my tears gushed out and ran down my face like rain.

I cried on Martin once more—I could not help it. And looking down at the closed eyes of my child my soul gushed out in gratitude to God, who had sent me this for all I had suffered.

"Hush, hush! You will do yourself a mischief and it will be bad for the milk," said the nurse.

After that I tried to control myself. But I found a fierce and feverish delight in suckling my child. It seemed as if every drop my baby drew gave me a spiritual as well as a physical joy—cooling my blood and my brain and wiping out all my troubles.

Oh mystery of mysteries! Oh miracle of miracles!

My baby was at my breast and my sufferings were at an end.

EIGHTY-EIGHTH CHAPTER

THAT was a long, long day of happiness.

It was both very long and very short, for it passed like a dream.

What wonderful happenings were crowded into it!

First the nurse, from the dizzy heights of her greater experience and superior knowledge, indulged my infantile anxieties by allowing me to look on while baby was being bathed, and rewarded me for "being good" by many praises of my baby's beauty.

"I've nursed a-many in my time," she said, "but I don't mind saying as I've never had a bonnier babby on my knee. Look at her legs now, so white and plump and dimpled. Have you *ever* seen anythink so putty?"

I confessed that I never had, and when nurse showed me how to fix the binder, and put on the barrow-coat without disturbing baby while asleep, I thought her a wonderful woman.

Emmerjane, who had with difficulty been kept out of the room last night and was now rushing breathlessly up and down stairs, wished to hold baby for a moment, and at length out of the magnificence of my generosity I allowed her to do so, only warning her, as she loved her life, to hold tight and not let baby fall.

"How'd you mean?" said the premature little mother. "*Me* let her fall? Not much!"

Every hour, according to the doctor's orders, I gave baby the breast. I do not know which was my greatest joy—to feast my eyes on her while she sucked and to see her little head fall back with her little mouth open when she had had enough, or to watch her when she stretched herself and hiccoughed, and then grasped my thumb with her little tight fingers.

Oh, the wild, inexpressible delight of it!

Every hour had its surprise. Every few minutes had their cause of wonder.

It rather hurt me when baby cried, and I dare say my own foolish lip would drop at such moments, but when I saw that there were no tears in her eyes, and she was only calling for her food, I pleaded with nurse to let me give her the breast again.

The sun shone all day long, and though the holland window blinds were kept down to subdue the light, for my sake and perhaps for baby's, I thought my room looked perfectly beautiful. It might be poor and shabby, but flights of angels could not have made it more heavenly than it was in my eyes then.

In the afternoon nurse told me I must take some sleep myself, but I would not sleep until baby slept, so she had to give me my cherub again, and I sat up and rocked her and for a while I sang—as softly as I could—a little lullaby.

It was a lullaby I had learned at Nemi from the Italian women in embroidered outside stays, who so love their children; and though I knew quite well that it had been written for the Mother of all Mothers, who, after she had been turned away from every door, had been forced to take refuge in a stable in Bethlehem, I was in such an ecstasy of spiritual happiness that I thought it no irreverence to change it a little and to sing it in my London lodging to my human child.

"Sleep, little baby, I love thee, I love thee,
Sleep, little Queen, I am bending above thee."

I dare say my voice was sweet that day—a mother's voice is always sweet—for when Emmerjane, who had been out of the room, came back to it with a look of awed solemnity, she said:

"Well, I never did! I thought as 'ow there was a' angel a-come into this room."

"So there is, and here she is," I said, beaming down on my sleeping child.

But the long, short, blissful day came to an end at last, and when night fell and I dropped asleep, there were two names of my dear ones on my lips, and if one of them was the name of him who (as I thought) was in heaven, the other was the name of her who was now lying in my arms.

I may have been poor, but I felt like a queen with all the riches of life in my little room.

I may have sinned against the world and the Church, but I felt as if God had justified me by His own triumphant law.

The whole feminine soul in me seemed to swell and throb, and with my baby at my breast I wanted no more of earth or heaven.

I was still bleeding from the bruises of Fate, but I felt healed of all my wounds, loaded with benefits, crowned with rewards.

Four days passed like this, varied by visits from the doctor and my Welsh landlady. Then my nurse began to talk of leaving me.

I did not care. In my ignorance of my condition, and the greed of my motherly love, I was not sorry she was going so soon. Indeed, I was beginning to be jealous of her, and was looking forward to having my baby all to myself.

But nurse, as I remember, was a little ashamed and tried to excuse herself.

"If I hadn't promised to nurse another lady, I wouldn't leave you, money or no money," she said. "But the girl" (meaning Emmerjane) "is always here, and if she isn't like a nurse she's 'andy."

"Yes, yes, I shall be all right," I answered.

On the fifth day my nurse left me, and shocking as that fact seems to me now, I thought little of it then.

I was entirely happy. I had nothing in the world except my baby, and my baby had nothing in the world except me. I was still in the dungeon that had seemed so dreadful to me before—the great dungeon of London to one who is poor and friendless.

But no matter! I was no longer alone, for there was one more inmate in my prison-house—my child.

SIXTH PART

I AM LOST

"Is it nothing to you, ye that pass by . . . ?"

MEMORANDUM BY MARTIN CONRAD

I hate to butt in where I may not be wanted, but if the remainder of my darling's story is to be understood I must say what was happening in the meantime to me.

God knows there was never a day on which I did not think of my dear one at home, wondering what was happening to her, and whether a certain dark fact which always lay at the back of my mind as a possibility was actually coming to pass.

But she would be brave—I know that quite well—and I saw plainly that, if I had to get through the stiff job that was before me, I must put my shadowy fears away and think only of the dangers I was sure about.

The first of these was that she might suppose our ship was lost, so as soon as we had set up on old Erebus the wooden lattice towers which contained our long-distance electric apparatus, I tried to send her that first message from the Antarctic which was to say we had not been shipwrecked.

It was a thrilling moment. Exactly at the stroke of midnight on January 21, while the midnight sun was shining with its dull sullen glow, the whole of our company having gathered round, the wireless man prepared to despatch my message.

As we were not sure of our machinery I had drawn up the words to suit any place into which they might fall if they missed their intended destination:

"South Pole Expedition safe. All well. Send greetings to dear ones at home."

For some forty seconds the sparks crackled out their snappy signals into the crisp night air, and then the settled calm returned, and we stood in breathless silence like beings on the edge of a world waiting for the answer to come as from another planet.

It came. After a few minutes we heard from our magnetic detector the faint sound of the S signals, and then we broke into a great cheer. It was not much, but it was enough; and while our scientific staff were congratulating themselves that electric-wave telegraphy was not inhibited by long distance, or by the earth's curvature over an arc of a great circle, I was thinking of my dear one—that one way or another my message would reach her and she would be relieved.

Then in splendid health and spirits—dogs, ponies, and men all A 1—we started on our journey, making a bee-line for the Pole.

Owing to the heavy weights we had to transport our progress was slow, much slower than we had expected; and though the going was fair and we kept a steady pace, travelling a good deal by night, it was not until the end of March that we reached Mount Darwin, which I had fixed on for the second of our electric power stations.

By this time winter was approaching, the nights were beginning to be dark and cold, and the altitude (8000 ft.) was telling on some of us.

Nevertheless our second installation got finished about the last week in April, and again we gathered round (not quite such a hearty company as before) while the wireless man spoke to the operator we had left on Erebus.

Again the electrical radiations went crackling into space, and again we gave a cheer when the answer came back—all well and instruments in perfect order.

Then, late as it was, we began on the last stage of our journey, which we knew would be a hard one. Three hundred geographical miles in front; temperature down to minus 40°; the sun several weeks gone, and nothing before us but thickening twilight, cold winds, snow, the rare aurora and the frequent moon.

But the worst fact was that our spirits were low, and do what I would to keep a good heart and cheer up the splendid fellows who had come with me, I could not help feeling the deepening effect of that sunless gloom.

In spite of this, I broke camp on April 25, and started straight as a die for the South.

It was a stiff fight over the upper glacier in latitude 85, with its razor-shaped ice, full of snow-covered crevasses, and three days out two of our best men fell into one of the worst of them.

I saw the accident from a dozen yards away, and running up I lay on my stomach and shouted down, but it was a black bottomless gulf and not a sound or a sign came back to me.

This cast a still deeper gloom on our company, who could not be cheered up, though I kept telling them we should be on the great plateau soon, please God, and then we should have a clear road to the Pole.

We were not much better on top though, for the surface was much broken up, and in that brewing place of the winds there seemed to be nothing but surging seas of cumulus cloud and rolling waves of snow.

The Polar march was telling on us badly. We were doing no more than seven miles at a stretch. So to help my shipmates to keep up their spirits (and perhaps to give a bit of a "heise" to my own) I had to sing all day long—though my darling is right that I have no more voice than a corncrake.

Sometimes I sang "Ramsey Town," because it did not want much music, but generally "Sally's the gel for me," because it had a rattling chorus. The men all joined in (scientific experts included), and if the angels took any heed of us, I think it must have touched them up to look down on our little company of puny men singing away as we trudged through that snowy wilderness which makes a man feel so small.

But man can only do his best, and as Father Dan (God bless his old heart!) used to say, the angels can do no more. We were making middling hard work of it in the 88th parallel, with a temperature as low as 50 degrees of frost, when a shrieking, blinding blizzard came sweeping down on us from the south.

I thought it might blow itself out, but it didn't, so we struck camp in a broad half-circle, building igloos (snow huts) with their backs (like rain-beaten cattle) to the storm.

There we lay nine days—and it is not worth while now to say how much some of our men suffered from frozen fingers, and more from falling spirits.

Sometimes I heard them saying (in voices that were intended to be loud enough for me to hear) it would have been better to have built winter quarters on the north of Darwin and settle there until the return of summer. And at other times I heard them counting the distance to the Pole—a hundred geographical miles, making twenty days' march at this season, with the heavy weights we had to carry, and the dwindling of our dogs and ponies, for we had killed a lot of them for food.

But I would not give in, for I felt that to go back without finishing my job would break my heart; and one day when old Treacle said, "No use, guv'nor, let's give it best," I flew at him like a hunted tiger.

All the same I was more than a bit down myself, for there were days when death was very near, and one night it really broke me up to hear a big strapping chap saying to the man who shared his two-man sack, "I shouldn't care a whiff if it wasn't for the wife and the kiddies."

God knows I had my own anchor at home, and sometimes it had a devil of a tug at me. I fought myself hard, though, and at last in my desire to go on and my yearning to go back to my dear one, I made an awful proposal, such as a man does not much like to think of after a crisis is over.

"Shipmates," I said, "it isn't exactly my fault that we are here in the middle of winter, but here we are, and we must make the best of it. I am going forward, and those who want to go with me can go. But those who don't want to go can stay; and so that no one may have it on his conscience that he has kept his comrades back, whether by weakness or by will, I have told the doctor to serve out a dose of something to every man, that he may end it whenever he wants to."

To my surprise that awful proposal was joyfully received; and never so long as I live shall I forget the sight of O'Sullivan going round the broad circle of my shipmates in the blue gloom of that noonday twilight and handing something to every one of them, while nobody spoke, and Death seemed to look us in the face.

And now I come to the incident for which I have told this story.

I could not get a wink of sleep that night for thinking of the brave fellows I had doomed to death by their own hands (for that was what it came to), because their souls were starving and they were thinking of home.

My soul was starving too, and whether it was the altitude (now 11,000 ft.) that was getting into my head, and giving me that draught in the brain which only travellers in frozen regions know, or the Power higher than Nature which speaks to a man in great solitudes when life is low, I cannot say, but as God is my witness, I was hearing again the voices of my dear ones so far away.

Sometimes they were the voices of my old people in Ellan, but more frequently, and most importunately, it was Mary's voice, calling me by my name, and crying to me for help as if she were in the shadow of some threatening danger.

"Martin! Martin! Martin!"

When this idea took clear possession of me—it was about three a.m. and the hurricane was yowling like a wounded dog—the answering thought came quick. I must go back. No matter at what cost or sacrifice—I must go back.

It was in vain I reflected that the trouble which threatened my darling (whatever it was, and I thought I knew) might be all over before I reached her side—I must go back.

And even when I reminded myself that I was within twenty days' march of that last point of my journey which was to be the crown and completion of it all, I also remembered that my dear one was calling me, and I had no choice but to obey.

Next morning, in the first light of the dim Antarctic glow, I crept out of my snow hut to look south with powerful glasses in order to make sure that there was no reason why I should change my mind.

There was none. Although the snow had ceased the blizzard was blowing a hundred miles an hour in cutting gusts, so with a bleeding heart (and yet a hot one) I told Treacle to call up our company, and when they stood round me in the shelter of my hut I said:

"Shipmates, I have been thinking things over during the night, and I see them differently now. Nature is stronger than man, and the nature that is inside of us sometimes hits us harder than that which is without. I think it is that way with us here, and I believe there isn't a man of you who wouldn't go forward with me if he had nobody to think of except himself. . . . Well, perhaps *I* have somebody to think of, too, so we'll stick together, shipmates, and whatever regrets there may be, or disappointments, or heart-breakings, we'll . . . we'll go back home."

I think it says something for the mettle my men were made of that there was never a cheer after I said that, for they could see what it cost me to say it. But by God, there was a shout when I added:

"We've drawn a blank this time, boys, but we'll draw a winner yet, and I ask you to swear that you'll come back with me next year, please God, to finish the work we've begun."

Then we gripped hands in that desolate place, and took our solemn oath, and God knows we meant to keep it.

It did not take long to strike camp, I can tell you. The men were bustling about like boys and we had nothing to think of now but the packing of the food and the harnessing of the dogs and ponies, for we were leaving everything else behind us.

At the last moment before we turned northward I planted the Union Jack on the highest hummock of snow, and when we were a hundred yards off I looked back through the gloom and saw it blowing stiffly in the wind.

I don't think I need tell how deeply that sight cut me, but if life has another such moment coming for me all I have to say is that I hope I may die before I live to see it—which is Irish, but most damnably true.

That was twelve o'clock noon on the eighth day of June; and anybody may make what he likes of what I say, but as nearly as I can calculate the difference of time between London and where we were in the 88th latitude it was the very hour of my dear one's peril. M. C.

[END OF MARTIN CONRAD'S MEMORANDUM]

EIGHTY-NINTH CHAPTER

Two weeks passed and if I suffered from getting up too soon I was never conscious of it.

Once or twice, perhaps, in the early days I felt a certain dizziness and had to hold on for a moment to the iron rail of my bedstead, but I was too much occupied with the tender joys of motherhood to think much about myself.

Bathing, dressing, undressing, and feeding my baby were a perpetual delight to me.

What a joy it all was!

There must be something almost animal, even voluptuous, in mothers' love, for there was nothing I liked so much as having baby naked on my knee and devouring its sweet body all over with kisses—putting its little fat hands and even its little fat feet into my mouth.

There must be something almost infantile, too, for sometimes after I had talked to my darling with a flood of joyous chatter I would even find myself scolding her a little, and threatening what I would do if she did not "behave."

Oh, mysterious laws of motherhood! Only God can fathom the depths of them.

It was just as if sixteen years of my life had rolled back, and I was again a child in my mother's room playing with my dolls under the table. Only there was something so wonderful now in the sweet eyes that looked up at me, that at certain moments I would fall into a long reverie and my heart would be full of adoration.

What lengths I went to!

It was the height of the London season when baby came; and sometimes at night, looking through my window, I saw the tail-end of the long queue of carriages and electric broughams which stretched to the end of the street I lived in, from the great houses fronting the Park where balls and receptions were being held until the early hours of morning. But I never envied the society ladies they were waiting for. On the contrary I pitied them, remembering they were childless women for the most part and thinking their pleasures were hollow as death compared with mine.

I pitied the rich mothers too—the mothers who banish their babies to nurseries to be cared for by servants, and I thought how much more blessed was the condition of poor mothers like myself who kept all that sweetness to themselves.

How happy I was! No woman coming into a fortune was ever so happy. I sang all day long. Sometimes it was the sacred music of the convent in which each note, with its own glory of sound, wraps one's heart round as with a rainbow, but more frequently it was "Ramsey Town" or "Sally's the gel for me," which were only noisy nonsense but dear to me by such delicious memories.

My neighbours would come to their doors to listen, and when I had stopped I would hear them say:

"Our lady is a 'appy 'eart, isn't she?"

I suppose it was because I was so happy that my looks returned to me, though I did not know it was so until one morning, after standing a moment at the window, I heard somebody say:

"Our lady seems to be prettier than ever now her baby has come."

I should not have been a woman if I could have resisted that, so I ran to the glass to see if it was true, and it was.

The ugly lines that used to be in my cheeks had gone, my hair had regained its blue-black lustre, and my eyes had suddenly become bright like a darkened room when the shutters are opened and the sunshine streams into it.

But the coming of baby did better for me than that. It brought me back to God, before whom I now felt so humble and so glad, because he had transformed the world for me.

Every Catholic will know why I could not ask for the benediction of the Church after childbirth; but he will also know why I was in a fever of anxiety to have my baby baptized at the earliest possible moment. It was not that I feared her death (I never thought of that in those days), but because I lived in dread of the dangers which had darkened my thoughts before she was born.

So when baby was nearly a fortnight old I wrote to the Rector of a neighbouring Catholic Church asking when I might bring her to be baptized, and he sent me a printed reply, giving the day and hour, and enclosing a card to be filled up with her name and all other particulars.

What a day of joy and rapture was that of my baby's baptism! I was up with the sun on the morning appointed to take her to church and spent hours and hours in dressing her.

How lovely she looked when I had finished! I thought she was the sweetest thing in the world, sweeter than a rosebud under its sparkling web of dew when the rising sun is glistening on it.

After I had put on all the pretty clothes I had prepared for her before she was born—the christening robe and the pelisse and the knitted bonnet with its pink ribbons and the light woollen veil—I lifted her up to the glass to look at herself, being such a child myself and so wildly, foolishly happy.

"That old Rector won't see anything equal to her *this* summer morning anyway," I thought.

And then the journey to church!

I have heard that unmarried mothers, going out for the first time after their confinement, feel ashamed and confused, as if every passer-by must know their shameful secret. I was a kind of unmarried mother myself, God help me, but I had no such feeling. Indeed I felt proud and gay, and when I sailed out with my baby in my arms I thought all the people in our street were looking at me, and I am sure I wanted to say "Good morning" to everybody I met on my way.

The church was not in a joyous quarter. It stood on the edge of a poor and very populous district, with a flaunting public-house immediately opposite. When I got to it I found a number of other mothers (all working women), with their babies and the godfathers and godmothers they had provided for them, waiting at the door.

At this sight I felt very stupid, for I had been thinking so much about other things (some of them vain enough perhaps) that I had forgotten the necessity for sponsors; and I do not know what I should have done at that last moment if the sacristan had not come to my relief—finding me two old people who, for a fee of a shilling each, were willing to stand godmother and godfather to my darling.

Then the priest came out of the church in his white surplice and stole, and we all gathered in the porch for the preliminary part of the sacrament.

What an experience it was! Never since my marriage had I been in a state of such spiritual exaltation.

The sacristan, showing me some preference, had put me in the middle of the row, immediately in front of the priest, so what happened to the other children I do not know, having eyes and ears for nothing but the baptism of my own baby.

There were some mistakes, but they did not trouble me, although one was a little important.

When the priest said, "What name give you this child?" I handed the Rector's card to the sacristan, and whispered "Isabel Mary" to the godmother, but the next thing I heard was:

"Mary Isabel, what dost thou ask of the Church of God?"

But what did it matter? Nothing mattered except one thing—that my darling should be saved by the power of the Holy Sacrament from the dark terrors which threatened her.

Oh, it is a fearful and awful thing, the baptism of a child, if you really and truly believe in it. And I did—from the bottom of my heart and soul I believed in it and trusted it.

In my sacred joy I must have cried nearly all the time, for I had taken baby's bonnet off, I remember, and holding it to my mouth I found after a while that I was wetting it with my tears.

When the exorcisms were over, the priest laid the end of his stole over baby's shoulder and led her (as our prayer books say) into the church, and we all followed to the baptistery, where I knelt immediately in front of the font, with the old godmother before me, the other mothers on either side, and a group of whispering children behind.

The church was empty, save for two charwomen who were sweeping the floor of the nave somewhere up by the dark and silent altar; and when the sacristan closed the outer door there was a solemn hush, which was broken only by the priest's voice and the godparents' muttered responses.

"Mary Isabel, dost thou renounce Satan?"

"I do renounce him."

"And all his works?"

"I do renounce them."

"And all his pomps?"

"I do renounce them."

The actual baptism was like a prayer to me. I am sure my whole soul went out to it. And though I may have been a sinful woman unworthy to be churched, I know, and God knows, that no chaste and holy nun ever prayed with a purer heart than I did then, kneeling there with my baby's bonnet to my mouth.

"Mary Isabel, I baptize thee in the name of the Father ✠ and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Ghost.✠"

Except that baby cried a little when the water was poured on her head (as she had cried when the salt was put on her tongue), I knew no more after that until I saw the candle in the godfather's hand (which signified that my child had been made a Child of Light) and heard the priest say:

"Go in peace and the Lord be with thee."

Then I awoke as from a trance. There was a shuffling of feet. The priest was going away. The solemn rite was at an end.

I rose from my knees, put a little money in the plate which the sacristan held out to me, gave a shilling to each of the two old sponsors, took baby back into my arms, and sat down in a pew to put on her bonnet and veil.

The spiritual exaltation which had sustained me lasted until I reached the street where the other mothers and their friends were laughing and joking, in voices that had to be pitched high over the rattle of the traffic, about going to the house opposite to "wet the baby's head."

But I think something of the celestial light of the sacrament must have been on my face still when I reached home, for I remember that as I knocked at the door, and waited for the rope from the kitchen to open it, I heard one of my neighbours say:

"Our lady has taken a new lease of life, hasn't she?"

I thought I had—a great new lease of physical and spiritual life.

But how little did I know what Fate had in store for me!

NINETIETH CHAPTER

I WAS taking off baby's outdoor things when my Welsh landlady came up to ask how I had got on, and after I had told her she said:

"And now thee'st got to get the jewel registered."

"Registered?"

"Within three weeks. It's the law, look you."

That was the first thing that frightened me. I had filled up truthfully enough the card which the Rector had sent me, because I knew that the register of my Church must be as sacred as its confessional.

But a public declaration of my baby's birth and parentage seemed to be quite another matter—charged with all the dangers to me, to Martin, and above all to my child, which had overshadowed my life before she was born.

More than once I felt tempted to lie, to make a false declaration, to say that Martin had been my husband and Isabel was my legitimate child.

But at length I resolved to speak the truth, the plain truth, telling myself that God's law was above man's law, and I had no right to be ashamed.

In this mood I set off for the Registry Office. It was a long way from where I lived, and carrying baby in my arms I was tired when I got there.

I found it to be a kind of private house, with an open vestibule and a black-and-white enamelled plate on the door-post, saying "Registry of Births and Deaths."

In the front parlour (which reminded me of Mr. Curphy's office in Holmtown) there was a counter by the door and a large table covered with papers in the space within.

Two men sat at this table, an old one and a young one, and I remember that I thought the old one must have been reading aloud from a newspaper which he held open in his hand, for as I entered the young one was saying:

"Extraordinary! Perfectly extraordinary! And everybody thought they were lost, too!"

In the space between the door and the counter two women were waiting. Both were poor and obviously agitated. One had a baby in her arms, and when it whimpered for its food she unbuttoned her dress and fed it openly. The other woman, whose eyes were red as if she had been crying, wore a coloured straw hat over which, in a pitiful effort to assume black, she had stretched a pennyworth of cheap crêpe.

In his own good time the young man got up to attend to them. He was a very ordinary young clerk in a check suit, looking frankly bored by the dull routine of his daily labour, and palpably unconscious of the fact that every day and hour of his life he was standing on the verge of the stormiest places of the soul.

Opening one of two registers which lay on the counter (the Register of Births) he turned first to the woman with the child. Her baby, a boy, was illegitimate, and in her nervousness she stumbled and stammered, and he corrected her sharply.

Then opening the other register (the Register of Deaths) he attended to the woman in the crêpe. She had lost her little girl, two years old, and produced a doctor's certificate. While she gave the particulars she held a soiled handkerchief to her mouth as if to suppress a sob, but the young clerk's composure remained undisturbed.

I do not know if it was the agitation of the two poor women that made me nervous, but when they were gone and my turn had come, I was hot and trembling.

The young clerk, however, who was now looking at me for the first time, had suddenly become respectful. With a bow and a smile he asked me if I wished to register my child, and when I answered yes he asked me to be good enough to step up to the counter.

"And what is your baby's name, please?" he asked.

I told him. He dipped his pen in his metal ink-pot, shook some drops back, made various imaginary flourishes over his book and wrote:

"Mary Isabel."

"And now," he said, with another smile, "the full name, profession, and place of residence of the father."

I hesitated for a moment, and then, making a call on my resolution, I said:

"Martin Conrad, seaman, deceased."

The young clerk looked up quickly.

"Did you say Martin Conrad, ma'am?" he asked, and as well as I could for a click in my throat I answered:

"Yes."

He paused as if thinking; then with the same flourish as before he wrote that name also, and after he had done so, he twisted his face about to the old man, who was sitting behind him, and said, in a voice that was not meant to reach me:

"Extraordinary coincidence, isn't it?"

"Extraordinary!" said the old man, who had lowered his newspaper and was looking across at me over the rims of his spectacles.

"And now," said the young clerk, "your own name and your maiden name if you please."

"Mary O'Neill."

The young clerk looked up at me again. I was holding baby on my left arm and I could see that his eye caught my wedding ring.

"Mary Conrad, maiden name O'Neill, I presume?" he said.

I hesitated once more. The old temptation was surging back upon me. But making a great pull on my determination to tell the truth (or what I believed to be the truth) I answered:

"No, Mary O'Neill simply."

"Ah!" said the young clerk, and I thought his manner changed instantly.

There was silence for some minutes while the young clerk filled up his form and made the copy I was to carry away.

I heard the scratching of the young clerk's pen, the crinkling of the old man's newspaper, the hollow ticking of a round clock on the wall, the dull hum of the traffic in the streets, and the thud-thud-thudding in my own bosom.

Then the entry was read out to me and I was asked to sign it.

"Sign here, please," said the young clerk in quite a different tone, pointing to a vacant line at the bottom of the book, and I signed with a trembling hand and a feeling of only partial consciousness.

I hardly know what happened after that until I was standing in the open vestibule, settling baby on my arm afresh for my return journey, and telling myself that I had laid a stigma upon my child which would remain with her as long as she lived.

It was a long, long way back, I remember, and when I reached home (having looked neither to the right nor left, nor at anything or anybody, though I felt as if everybody had been looking at me) I had a sense of dimness of sight and of aching in the eyeballs.

I did not sing very much that day, and I thought baby was rather restless.

Towards nightfall I had a startling experience.

I was preparing Isabel for bed, when I saw a red flush, like a rash, down the left side of her face.

At first I thought it would pass away, but when it did not I called my Welsh landlady upstairs to look at it.

"Do you see something like a stain on baby's face?" I asked, and then waited breathlessly for her answer.

"No. . . . Yes. . . . Well," she said, "now that thee'st saying so . . . perhaps it's a birthmark."

"A birthmark?"

"Did'st strike thy face against anything when baby was coming?"

I made some kind of reply, I hardly know what, but the truth, or what I thought to be the truth, flashed on me in a moment.

Remembering my last night at Castle Raa, and the violent scene which had occurred there, I told myself that the flush on baby's face was the mark of my husband's hand which, making no impression upon me, had been passed on to my child, and would remain with her to the end of her life, as the brand of her mother's shame and the sign of what had been called her bastardy.

How I suffered at the sight of it! How time after time that night I leaned over my sleeping child to see if the mark had passed away! How again and again I knelt by her side to pray that if sin of mine had to be punished the punishment might fall on me and not on my innocent babe!

At last I remembered baby's baptism and told myself that if it meant anything it meant that the sin in which my child had been born, the sin of those who had gone before her (if sin it was), had been cast out of her soul with the evil spirits which had inspired them.

"This sign of the Holy Cross ✠ which we make upon her forehead do thou, accursed devil, never dare to violate."

God's law had washed my darling white! What could man's law—his proud but puny morality—do to injure her? It could do nothing!

That comforted me. When I looked at baby again the flush had gone and I went to bed quite happy.

NINETY-FIRST CHAPTER

I THINK it must have been the morning of the next day when the nurse who had attended me in my confinement came to see how I was going along.

I told her of the dimness of my sight and the aching of my eyeballs, whereupon she held up her hands and cried:

"There now! What did I tell you? Didn't I say it is *after* a lady feels it?"

The moral of her prediction was that, being in a delicate state of health, and having "let myself low" before baby was born, it was my duty to wean her immediately.

I could not do it.

Although the nurse's advice was supported by my Welsh landlady (with various prognostications of consumption and rickets), I could not at first deny myself the wild joy of nursing my baby.

But a severer monitor soon came to say that I must. I found that my money was now reduced to little more than two pounds, and that I was confronted by the necessity (which I had so long put off) of looking for employment.

I could not look for employment until I had found a nurse for my child, and I could not find a nurse until my baby could do without me, so when Isabel was three weeks old I began to wean her.

At first I contented myself with the hours of night, keeping a feeding-bottle in bed, with the cow's milk warmed to the heat of my own body. But when baby cried for the breast during the day I could not find it in my heart to deny her.

That made the time of weaning somewhat longer than it should have been, but I compromised with my conscience by reducing still further my meagre expenses.

Must I tell how I did so?

Although it was the month of July there was a snap of cold weather such as sometimes comes in the middle of our English summer, and yet I gave up having a fire in my room, and for the cooking of my food I bought a small spirit stove which cost me a shilling.

This tempted me to conduct which has since had consequences, and I am half ashamed and half afraid to speak of it. My baby linen being little I had to wash it frequently, and having no fire I . . . . dried it on my own body.

Oh, I see now it was reckless foolishness, almost wilful madness, but I thought nothing of it then. I was poor and perhaps I was proud, and I could not afford a fire. And then a mother's love is as deep as the sea, and there was nothing in the wide world I would not have done to keep my darling a little longer beside me.

Baby being weaned at last I had next to think of a nurse, and that was a still more painful ordeal. To give my child to another woman, who was to be the same as a second mother to her, was almost more than I could bear to think about.

I *had* to think of it. But I could only do so by telling myself that, when I put baby out to nurse, I might arrange to see her every morning and evening and as often as my employment permitted.

This idea partly reconciled me to my sacrifice, and I was in the act of drawing up a newspaper advertisement in these terms when my landlady came to say that the nurse knew of somebody who would suit me exactly.

Nurse called the same evening and told me a long story about her friend.

She was a Mrs. Oliver, and she lived at Ilford, which was at the other end of London and quite on the edge of the country. The poor woman, who was not too happily married, had lost a child of her own lately, and was now very lonely, being devoted to children.

This pleased me extremely, especially (God forgive me!) the fact that Mrs. Oliver was a bereaved mother and lived on the edge of the country.

Already in my mind's eye I saw her sitting on sunny days under a tree (perhaps in an orchard) with Isabel in her arms, rocking her gently and singing to her softly, and almost forgetting that she was not her own baby whom she had lost . . . though that was a two-edged sword which cut me both ways, being a sort of wild joy with tears lurking behind it.

So I took a note of Mrs. Oliver's address (10 Lennard's Row, Lennard's Green, Ilford) and wrote to her the same night, asking her terms and stating my own conditions.

A reply came the following day. It was a badly-written and misspelt letter, which showed me that Mrs. Oliver must be a working woman (perhaps the wife of a gardener or farm-labourer, I thought), though that did not trouble me in the least, knowing by this time how poor people loved their children.

> "*The terms is fore shillins a weke,*" she wrote, "*but i am that lonelie sins my own littel one lef me i wood tike your swete darling for nothin if I cud afford it and you can cum to see her as offen as you pleas.*"

In my ignorance and simplicity this captured me completely, so I replied at once saying I would take baby to Ilford the next day.

I did all this in a rush, but when it came to the last moment I could scarcely part with my letter, and I remember that I passed three pillar-boxes in the front street before I could bring myself to post it.

I suppose my eyes must have been red when I returned home, for my Welsh landlady (whom I had taken into my confidence about my means) took me to task for crying, telling me that I ought to thank God for what had happened, which was like a message from heaven, look you, and a dispensation of Providence.

I tried to see things in that light, though it was difficult to do so, for the darker my prospects grew the more radiant shone the light of the little angel by whose life I lived, and the harder it seemed to live without her.

"But it isn't like losing my child altogether, is it?" I said.

"'Deed no, and 'twill be better for both of you," said my landlady.

"Although Ilford is a long way off I can go there every day, can't I?"

"'Deed thee can, if thee'st not minding a journey of nine miles or more."

"And if I can get a good situation and earn a little money I may be able to have baby back and hire somebody to nurse her, and so keep her all to myself."

"And why shouldn't thee?" said my Welsh landlady. "Thee reading print like the young minister and writing letters like a copybook!"

So in the fierce bravery of motherly love I dried my eyes and forced back my sobs, and began to pack up my baby's clothes, and to persuade myself that I was still quite happy.

My purse was very low by this time. After paying my rent and some other expenses I had only one pound and a few shillings left.

NINETY-SECOND CHAPTER

At half past seven next morning I was ready to start on my journey.

I took a hasty glance at myself in the glass before going out, and I thought my eyes were too much like the sky at daybreak —all joyful beams with a veil of mist in front of them.

But I made myself believe that never since baby was born had I been so happy. I was sure I was doing the best for her.

I was also sure I was doing the best for myself, for what could be so sweet to a mother as providing for her child?

My Welsh landlady had told me it was nine miles to Ilford, and I had gathered that I could ride all the way in successive omnibuses for less than a shilling. But shillings were scarce with me then, so I determined to walk all the way.

Emmerjane, by her own urgent entreaty, carried baby as far as the corner of the Bayswater Road, and there the premature little woman left me, after nearly smothering baby with kisses.

"Keep straight as a' arrow and you can't lose your wye," she said.

It was one of those beautiful mornings in late July when the air is fresh and the sun is soft, and the summer, even in London, has not yet had time to grow tired and dusty.

I felt as light as the air itself. I had put baby's feeding-bottle in my pocket and hung her surplus linen in a parcel about my wrist, so I had nothing to carry in my arms except baby herself, and at first I did not feel her weight.

There were not many people in the West-End streets at that early hour, yet a few were riding in the Park, and when I came to the large houses in Lancaster Gate I saw that though the sun was shining on the windows most of the blinds were down.

I must have been walking slowly, for it was half past eight when I reached the Marble Arch. There I encountered the first cross-tide of traffic, but somebody, seeing baby, took me by the arm and led me safely over.

The great "Mediterranean of Oxford Street" was by this time running at full tide. People were pouring out of the Tube and Underground stations and clambering on to the motor-buses. But in the rush nobody hustled or jostled me. A woman with a child in her arms was like a queen—everybody made way for her.

Once or twice I stopped to look at the shops. Some of the dressmakers' windows were full of beautiful costumes. I did not covet any of them. I remembered the costly ones I had bought in Cairo and how little happiness they had brought me. And then I felt as if the wealth of the world were in my arms.

Nevertheless the whole feminine soul in me awoke when I came upon a shop for the sale of babies' clothes. Already I foresaw a time when baby, dressed in pretty things like these, would be running about Lennard's Green and plucking up the flowers in Mrs. Oliver's garden.

The great street was very long and I thought it would never end. But I think I must have been still fresh and happy while we passed through the foreign quarter of Soho, for I remember that, when two young Italian waiters, standing at the door of their café, asked each other in their own language which of us (baby or I) was ''the bambino,'' I turned to them and smiled.

Before I came to Chancery Lane, however, baby began to cry for her food, and I was glad to slip down a narrow alley into Lincoln's Inn Fields and sit on a seat in the garden while I gave her the bottle. It was then ten o'clock, the sun was high and the day was becoming hot.

The languid stillness of the garden after the noise and stir of the streets tempted me to stay longer than I had intended, and when I resumed my journey I thought the rest must have done me good, but before I reached the Holborn Viaduct fatigue was beginning to gain on me.

I saw that I must be approaching some great hospital, for hospital nurses were now passing me constantly, and one of them, who was going my way, stepped up and asked me to allow her to carry baby. She looked so sweet and motherly that I let her do so, and as we walked along we talked.

She asked me if I was going far, and I said no, only to the other end of London, the edge of the country, to Ilford.

''Ilford!'' she cried. ''Why, that's miles and miles away. You'll have to 'bus it to Aldgate, then change for Bow, and then tram it through Stratford Market.''

I told her I preferred to walk, being such a good walker, and she gave me a searching look, but said no more on that subject.

Then she asked me how old baby was and whether I was nursing her myself, and I answered that baby was six weeks and I had been forced to wean her, being supposed to be delicate, and besides . . .

''Ah, perhaps you are putting her out to nurse,'' she said, and I answered yes, and that was the reason I was going to Ilford.

''I see,'' she said, with another searching look, and then it flashed upon me that she had formed her own conclusions about what had befallen me.

When we came to a great building in a side street on the left, with ambulance vans passing in and out of a wide gateway, she said she was sorry she could not carry baby any further, because she was due in the hospital, where the house-doctor would be waiting for her.

"But I hope baby's nurse will be a good one. They're not always that, you know."

I was not quite so happy when the hospital nurse left me. The parcel on my wrist was feeling heavier than before, and my feet were beginning to drag. But I tried to keep a good heart as I faced the crowded thoroughfares—Newgate with its cruel old prison, the edge of St. Paul's, and the corner of St. Martin's-le-Grand, and so on into Cheapside.

Cheapside itself was almost impassable. Merchants, brokers, clerks, and city men generally in tall silk hats were hurrying and sometimes running along the pavement, making me think of the river by my father's house, whose myriad little waves seemed to my fancy as a child to be always struggling to find out which could get to Murphy's Mouth the first and so drown itself in the sea.

People were still very kind to me, though, and if anybody brushed me in passing he raised his hat; and if any one pushed me accidentally he stopped to say he was sorry.

Of course baby was the talisman that protected me from harm; and what I should have done without her when I got to the Mansion House I do not know, for that seemed to be the central heart of all the London traffic, with its motor-buses and taxi-cabs going in different directions and its tremendous tides of human life flowing every way.

But just as I was standing, dazed and deafened on the edge of a triangle of streets, looking up at a great building that was like a rock on the edge of a noisy sea, and bore on its face the startling inscription, "The Earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof," a big policeman, seeing me with baby in my arms, held up his hand to the drivers and shouted to the pedestrians ("Stand a-one side, please"), and then led me safely across, as if the Red Sea had parted to let us pass.

It was then twelve o'clock and baby was once more crying for her food, so I looked for a place in which I might rest while I gave her the bottle again.

Suddenly I came upon what I wanted. It seemed to be a garden, but it was a graveyard—one of the graveyards of the old London churches, enclosed by high buildings now, and overlooked by office windows.

Such a restful place, so green, so calm, so beautiful! Lying there in the midst of the tumultuous London traffic, it reminded me of one of the little islands in the middle of our

Ellan glens, on which the fuchsia and wild rose grow while the river rolls and boils about it.

I had just sat down on a seat that had been built about a gnarled and blackened old tree, and was giving baby her food, when I saw that a young girl was sitting beside me.

She was about nineteen years of age, and was eating scones out of a confectioner's bag, while she read a paper-covered novel. Presently she looked at baby with her little eyes, which were like a pair of shiny boot buttons, and said:

"That your child?"

I answered her, and then she asked:

"Do you like children?"

I answered her again, and asked her if she did not like them also.

"Can't say I'm particularly gone on them," she said, whereupon I replied that that was probably because she had not yet had much experience.

"Oh, haven't I? Perhaps I haven't," she said, and then with a hard little laugh, she added "Mother's had nine though."

I asked if she was a shop assistant, and with a toss of her head she told me she was a typist.

"Better screw and your evenings off," she said, and then she returned to the subject of children.

One of her chums in the office who used to go out with her every night to the music-halls got into trouble a year or two ago. As a consequence she had to marry. And what was the result? Never had her nose out of the wash-tub now!

The story was crude enough, yet it touched me closely.

"But couldn't she have put her baby out to nurse and got another situation somewhere?" I asked.

"Matter o' luck," said the girl. "Some can. Some can't. That's their look out. Firms don't like it. If they find you've got a child they gen'r'lly chuck you."

In spite of myself I was a little down when I started on my journey again. I thought the parcel was cutting my wrist and I felt my feet growing heavier at every step.

Was Maggie Jones's story the universal one?

If a child were born beyond the legal limits, was it a thing to hide away and be ashamed of?

And could it be possible that man's law was stronger than God's law after all?

NINETY-THIRD CHAPTER

I HAD walked so slowly and stopped so often that it was two o'clock in the afternoon when I passed through Aldgate.

I was then faint for want of food, so I looked out for a tea-shop or restaurant.

I passed several such places before I found the modest house I wanted. Then I stepped into it rather nervously and took the seat nearest the door.

It was an oblong room with red plush seats along the walls behind a line of marble-topped tables. The customers were all men, chiefly clerks and warehousemen, I thought, and the attendants were girls in black frocks and white aprons.

There seemed to be a constant fire of free-and-easy flirtation going on between them. At one table a man in a cloth cap was saying to the girl who had served him:

"What's the damage, dearie?"

"One roast, one veg, two breads—'levenpence, and no liberties, mister."

"Sunday off, Em'ly?" said a youth in a red tie at another table, and being told it was, he said:

"Then what do you say to 'oppin' up to 'Endon and 'aving a day in a boat?"

I had to wait some time before anybody came to attend to me, but at length a girl from the other end of the room, who had taken no part in these amatory exchanges, stepped up and asked what I wanted.

I ordered a glass of cold milk and a scone for myself and a pint of hot milk to replenish baby's bottle.

The girl served me immediately, and after rinsing and refilling the feeding-bottle she stood near while the baby used it.

She had quiet eyes and that indefinable expression of yearning tenderness which we sometimes see in the eyes of a dear old maid who has missed her motherhood.

The shop had been clearing rapidly; and as soon as the men were gone, and while the other girls were sitting in corners to read penny novelettes, my waitress leaned over and asked me if I did not wish to go into the private room to attend to baby.

A moment afterwards I followed her into a small apartment at the end of the shop, and there a curious thing occurred.

She closed the door behind us and asked me in an eager whisper to allow her to see to baby.

I tried to excuse myself, but she whispered:

"Hush! I have a baby of my own, though they know nothing about it here, so you can safely trust me."

I did so, and it was beautiful to see the joy she had in doing what was wanted, saying all sorts of sweet and gentle things to my baby (though I knew they were meant for her own), as if the starved mother-heart in her were stealing a moment of maternal tenderness.

"There!" she said. "She'll be comfortable now, bless her!"

I asked about her own child, and, coming close and speaking in a whisper, she told me all about it.

It was a girl and it would be a year old at Christmas. At first she had put it out to nurse in town, where she could see it every evening, but the foster-mother had neglected it, and the Inspector had complained, so she had been compelled to take it away. Now it was in a Home in the country, ten miles from Liverpool Street, and it was as bonny as a peach and as happy as the day is long.

"See," she whispered, taking a card from her breast, after a furtive glance towards the door. "I sent two shillings to have her photograph taken and the Matron has just sent it."

It was the picture of a beautiful baby girl, and I found it easy to praise her.

"I suppose you see her constantly, don't you?" I said.

The girl's face dropped.

"Only on visiting days, once a month, and not always that," she answered.

"But how can you live without seeing her oftener?" I asked.

"Matter o' means," she said sadly. "I pay five shillings a week for her board, and the train is one-and-eight return, so I have to be careful, you see, and if I lost my place what would happen to baby?"

I was very low and tired and down when I resumed my walk. But when I thought for a moment of taking omnibuses for the rest of my journey I remembered the waitress's story and told myself that the little I had belonged to my child, and so I struggled on.

But what a weary march it was during the next two hours! I was in the East End now, and remembering the splendour of the West, I could scarcely believe I was still in London.

Long, mean, monotonous streets, running off to right and left, miles on miles of them without form or feature, or any trace of nature except the blue strips of sky overhead.

Such multitudes of people, often badly dressed and generally with set and anxious faces, hasting to and fro, hustling, elbowing, jostling each other along, as if driven by some invisible power that was swinging an unseen scourge.

No gracious courtesy here! A woman with a child in her arms was no longer a queen. Children were cheap, and sometimes it was as much as I could do to save myself from being pushed off the pavement.

The air seemed to smell of nothing but ale and coarse tobacco. And then the noise! The ceaseless clatter of carts, the clang of electric cars, the piercing shrieks of the Underground Railway coming at intervals out of the bowels of the earth like explosions out of a volcano, and, above all, the raucous, rasping, high-pitched voices of the people, often foul-mouthed, sometimes profane, too frequently obscene.

A cold, grey, joyless, outcast city, cut off from the rest of London by an invisible barrier more formidable than a wall; a city in which the inhabitants seemed to live cold, grey, joyless lives, all the same that they joked and laughed; a city under perpetual siege, the siege of Poverty, in the constant throes of civil war, the War of Want, the daily and hourly fight for food.

If there were other parts of the East End (and I am sure there must be) where people live simple, natural, human lives, I did not see them that day, for my course was down the principal thoroughfares only.

Those thoroughfares, telescoping each other, one after another, seemed as if they would never come to an end.

How tired I was! Even baby was no longer light, and the parcel on my wrist had become as heavy as lead.

Towards four o'clock I came to a broad parapet which had strips of garden enclosed by railings and iron seats in front of them. Utterly exhausted, my arms aching and my legs limp, I sank into one of these seats, feeling that I could walk no farther.

But after a while I felt better, and then I became aware that another woman was sitting beside me.

When I looked at her first I thought I had never in my life seen anything so repulsive. She was asleep, and having that expressionless look which sleep gives, I found it impossible to know whether she was young or old. She was not merely coarse, she was gross. The womanhood in her seemed to be effaced, and I thought she was uterly brutalised and degraded.

Presently baby, who had also been asleep, awoke and cried, and then the woman opened her eyes and looked at the child, while I hushed her to sleep again.

There must be something in a baby's face that has a miraculous effect on every woman (as if these sweet angels, fresh from God, make us all young and all beautiful), and it was even so at that moment.

Never shall I forget the transfiguration in the woman's face when she looked into the face of my baby. The expression of brutality and degradation disappeared, and through the bleared eyes and over the coarsened features there came the light of an almost celestial smile.

After a while the woman spoke to me. She spoke in a husky voice which seemed to be compounded of the effects of rum and raw night air.

"That your'n," she said.

I answered her.

"Boy or gel?"

I told her.

"'Ow old?"

I told her that too.

The woman was silent for a moment, and then, with a thickening of the husky voice, she said:

"S'pose you'll say I'm a bleedin' liar, but I 'ad a kid as putty as that onct—puttier. It was a boy. The nobbiest little b—— as you ever come acrost. Your'n is putty, but it ain't in it with my Billie, not by a long chalk."

I asked her what had become of her child.

"Lawst 'im," she said. "Used to give sixpence a week to the woman what 'ad 'alf the 'ouse with me to look after 'im while I was workin' at the fact'ry. But what did the bleedin' b—— do? Blimey, if she didn't let 'im get run over by the dray from the brewery."

"Killed?" I said, clutching at baby.

The woman nodded without speaking.

I asked her how old her child had been.

"More'n four," she said. "Just old enough to run a arrand. It was crool. Hit me out, I can tell you. That kid was all I had. Apple o' my eye, in a manner of speakin'. When it was gone there wasn't much encouragement, was there? The Favver from the Mission came jawin' as 'ow Jesus 'ad taken 'im to 'Imself. Rot! When they put 'im down in old Bow I didn't care no more for nothin'. Monse and monse I walked about night and day, and the bleedin' coppers was allus on to me. They got their own way at last. I took the pneumonier and was laid up at the London. And when I got out I didn't go back to the fact'ry neither."

"What did you do?" I asked.

The woman laughed—bitterly, terribly.

"Do? Don't you *know?*"

I shook my head. The woman looked hard at me, and then at the child.

"Look here—are you a good gel?" she said.

Hardly knowing what she meant I answered that I hoped so.

"'Ope? Don't you know *that* neither?"

Then I caught her meaning, and answered faintly:

"Yes."

She looked searchingly into my eyes and said:

"I b'lieve you. Some gels is. S'elp me Gawd I don't know how they done it, though."

I was shuddering and trembling, for I was catching glimpses, as if by broken lights from hell, of the life behind—the wrecked hope, the shattered faith, the human being hunted like a beast and at last turned into one.

Just at that moment baby awoke and cried again. The woman looked at her with the same look as before—not so much a smile as a sort of haggard radiance.

Then leaning over me she blew puffs of alcoholic breath into baby's face, and stretching out a coarse fat finger she tickled her under the chin.

Baby ceased to cry and began to smile. Seeing this the woman's eyes sparkled like sunshine.

"See that," she cried. "S'elp me Jesus, I b'lieve I could 'ave been good meself if I'd on'y 'ad somethink like this to keer for."

I am not ashamed to say that more than once there had been tears in my eyes while the woman spoke, though her blasphemies had corrupted the air like the gases that rise from a dust-heap. But when she touched my child I shuddered as if something out of the lowest depths had tainted her.

Then a strange thing happened.

I had risen to go, although my limbs could scarcely support me, and was folding my little angel closely in my arms, when the woman rose too and said:

"You wouldn't let me carry your kiddie a bit, would you?"

I tried to excuse myself, saying something, I know not what.

The woman looked at me again, and after a moment she said: "S'pose not. On'y I thought it might make me think as 'ow I was carryin' Billie."

That swept down everything.

The one remaining window of the woman's soul was open and I dared not close it.

I looked down at my child—so pure, so sweet, so stainless; I looked up at the woman—so foul, so gross, so degraded.

There was a moment of awful struggle and then . . . the woman and I were walking side by side.

And the harlot was carrying my baby down the street.

NINETY-FOURTH CHAPTER

At five o'clock I was once more alone.

I was then standing (with baby in my own arms now) under the statue which is at the back of Bow Church.

I thought I could walk no farther, and although every penny I had in my pocket belonged to Isabel (being all that yet stood between her and want) I must borrow a little of it if she was to reach Mrs. Oliver's that night.

I waited for the first tram that was going in my direction, and when it came up I signalled to it, but it did not stop—it was full.

I waited for a second tram, but that was still more crowded.

I reproached myself for having come so far. I told myself how ill-advised I had been in seeking for a nurse for my child at the farthest end of the city. I reminded myself that I could not hope to visit her every day if my employment was to be in the West, as I had always thought it would be. I asked myself if in all this vast London, with its myriads of homes, there had been no house nearer that could have sheltered my child.

Against all this I had to set something, or I think my very heart would have died there and then. I set the thought of Ilford, on the edge of the country, with its green fields and its flowers. I set the thought of Mrs. Oliver, who would love my child as tenderly as if she were her own little lost one.

I dare say it was all very weak and childish, but it is just when we are done and down, and do not know what we are doing, that Providence seems to be directing us, and it was so with me at that moment.

The trams being full I had concluded that Fate had set itself against my spending any of Isabel's money, and had made up my mind to make a fierce fight over the last stage of my journey, when I saw that a little ahead of where I was standing the road divided into two branches at an acute angle, one branch going to the right and the other to the left.

Not all Emmerjane's instructions about keeping "as straight as a' arrow" sufficed to show me which of the two roads to take and I looked about for somebody to tell me.

It was then that I became aware of a shabby old four-wheeled cab which stood in the triangular space in front of the statue, and of the driver (an old man, in a long coachman's coat, much worn and discoloured, and a dilapidated tall hat, very shiny in patches) looking at me while he took the nose-bag off his horse—a bony old thing with its head hanging down.

I stepped up to him and asked my way, and he pointed it out to me—to the right, over the bridge and through Stratford Market.

I asked how far it was to Ilford.

"Better nor two mile *I* call it," he answered.

After that, being so tired in brain as well as body, I asked a foolish question—how long it would take me to get there.

The old driver looked at me again, and said:

"'Bout a 'our and a 'alf I should say by the looks of you—and you carryin' the biby."

I dare say my face dropped sadly as I turned away, feeling very tired, yet determined to struggle through. But hardly had I walked twenty paces when I heard the cab coming up behind and the old driver crying:

"'Old on, missie."

I stopped, and to my surprise he drew up by my side, got down from his box, opened the door of his cab and said:

"Ger in."

I told him I could not afford to ride.

"Ger in," he said again more loudly, and as if angry with himself for having to say it.

Again I made some demur, and then the old man said, speaking fiercely through his grizzly beard:

"Look 'ere, missie. I 'ave a gel o' my own lost somewheres, and I wouldn't be ans'rable to my ole woman if I let you walk with a face like that."

I don't know what I said to him. I only know that my tears gushed out and that at the next moment I was sitting in the cab.

What happened then I do not remember, except that the dull rumble of the wheels told me we were passing over a bridge, and that I saw through the mist before my eyes a sluggish river, a muddy canal, and patches of marshy fields.

I think my weariness and perhaps my emotion, added to the heavy monotonous trotting of the old horse, must have put me to sleep, for after a while I was conscious of a great deal of noise, and of the old driver twisting about and shouting in a cheerful voice through the open window at the back of his seat:

"Stratford Market."

After a while we came to a broad road, full of good houses, and then the old driver cried "Ilford," and asked what part of it I wished to go to.

I reached forward and told him, "10 Lennard's Row, Lennard's Green," and then sat back with a lighter heart.

But after another little while I saw a great many funeral cars passing us, with the hearses empty, as if returning from a cemetery. This made me think of the woman and her story, and I found myself unconsciously clasping my baby closer.

The cortèges became so numerous at last that to shut out painful sights I closed my eyes and tried to think of pleasanter things.

I thought, above all, of Mrs. Oliver's house, as I had always seen it in my mind's eye—not a pretentious place at all, only a little humble cottage but very sweet and clean, covered with creepers and perhaps with roses.

I was still occupied with these visions when I felt the cab turn sharply to the left. Then opening my eyes I saw that we were running down a kind of alley-way, with a row of very mean little two-storey houses on the one side, and on the other, a kind of waste ground strewn with broken bottles, broken iron pans, broken earthenware and other refuse, interspersed with tufts of long scraggy grass, which looked the more wretched because the sinking sun was glistening over it.

Suddenly the cab slowed down and stopped. Then the old man jumped from his box and opening his cab door, said:

"Here you are, missie. This is your destingnation."

There must have been a moment of semi-consciousness in which I got out of the cab, for when I came to full possession of myself I was standing on a narrow pavement in front of a closed door which bore the number 10.

At first I was stunned. Then my heart was in my mouth, and it was as much as I could do not to burst out crying. Finally I wanted to fly, and I turned back to the cab, but it had gone and was already passing round the corner.

It was six o'clock. I was very tired. I was nine miles from Bayswater. I could not possibly carry baby back. What *could* I do?

Then, my brain being unable to think, a mystic feeling (born perhaps of my life in the convent) came over me—a feeling that all that had happened on my long journey, all I had seen and everything that had been said to me, had been intended to prepare me for (and perhaps to save me from) the dangers that were to come.

I think that gave me a certain courage, for with what strength of body and spirit I had left (though my heart was in my mouth still) I stepped across the pavement and knocked at the door.

MEMORANDUM BY MARTIN CONRAD

My great-hearted, heroic little woman!

All this time I, in my vain belief that our expedition was of some consequence to the world, was trying to comfort myself with the thought that my darling must have heard of my safety.

But how could I imagine that she had hidden herself away in a mass of humanity—which appears to be the most impenetrable depths into which a human being can disappear?

How could I dream that, to the exclusion of all such interests as mine, she was occupied day and night, night and day, with the joys and sorrows, the raptures and fears of the mighty passion of Motherhood, which seems to be the only thing in life that is really great and eternal?

Above all, how could I believe that in London itself, in the heart of the civilised and religious world, she was going through trials which make mine, in the grim darkness of the Polar night, seem trivial and easy?

It is all over now, and though, thank God, I did not know at the time what was happening to my dear one at home, it is some comfort to me to remember that I was acting exactly as if I did.

From the day we turned back I heard my darling's voice no more. But I had a still more perplexing and tormenting experience, and that was a dream about her, in which she was walking on a crevassed glacier towards a precipice which she could not see because the brilliant rays of the aurora were in her eyes.

Anybody may make what he likes of that on grounds of natural law, and certainly it was not surprising that my dreams should speak to me in pictures drawn from the perils of my daily life, but only one thing matters now—that these experiences of my sleeping hours increased my eagerness to get back to my dear one.

My comrades were no impediment to that, I can tell you. With their faces turned homewards, and the wind at their backs, they were showing tremendous staying power, although we had thirty and forty below zero pretty constantly, with rough going all the time, for the snow had been ruckled up by the blizzard to almost impassable heaps and hummocks.

On reaching our second installation at Mount Darwin I sent a message to the men at the foot of Mount Erebus, telling them to get into communication (through Macquarie Island) with the captain of our ship in New Zealand, asking him to return for us as soon as the ice conditions would permit; and this was the last of our jobs (except packing our instruments tight and warm) before we started down the "long white gateway" for our quarters at the Cape.

With all the heart in the world, though, our going had to be slow. It was the middle of the Antarctic winter, when absolute night reigned for weeks and we had nothing to alleviate the darkness but the light of the scudding moon, and sometimes the glory of the aurora as it encircled the region of the unrisen sun.

Nevertheless my comrades sang their way home through the sullen gloom. Sometimes I wakened the echoes of those desolate old hills myself with a stave of "Sally's the gel," although I was suffering a good deal from my darker thoughts of what the damnable hypocrisies of life might be doing with my darling, and my desire to take my share of her trouble whatever it might be.

The sun returned the second week in August. Nobody can know what relief that brought us except those who have lived for months without it. To see the divine and wonderful thing rise up like a god over those lone white regions is to know what a puny thing man is in the scheme of the world.

I think all of us felt like that at sight of the sun, though some (myself among the rest) were thinking more of it as a kind of message from friends at home. But old Treacle, I remember, who had stood looking at it in awed solemnity, said:

"Well, I'm d——!"

After that we got on famously until we reached Winter Quarters, where we found everybody well and everything in order, but received one piece of alarming intelligence—that the attempt to get into wireless communication with our ship had failed, with the result that we should have to wait for her until the time originally appointed for her return.

That did not seem to matter much to my shipmates, who, being snugly housed from blinding blizzards, settled down to amuse themselves with sing-songs and story-tellings and readings.

But, do what I would, to me the delay was dreadful, and every day, in the fever of my anxiety to get away as soon as the ice permitted, I climbed the slopes of old Erebus with O'Sullivan, to look through powerful glasses for what the good chap called the "open wather."

Thank God, our wooden house was large enough to admit of my having a cabin to myself, for I should have been ashamed of my comrades hearing the cries that sometimes burst from me in the night.

It is hard for civilised men at home, accustomed to hold themselves under control, to realise how a man's mind can run away from him when he is thousands of miles separated from his dear ones, and has a kind of spiritual certainty that evil is befalling them.

I don't think I am a bigger fool than most men in that way, but I shiver even yet at the memory of all the torment I went through during those days of waiting, for my whole life seemed to revolve before me and I accused myself of a thousand offences which I had thought dead and buried and forgotten.

Some of these were trivial in themselves, such as hot and intemperate words spoken in childhood to my good old people at home, disobedience or ingratitude shown to them, with all the usual actions of a naughty boy, who ought to have been spanked and never was.

But the worst of them concerned my darling, and came with the thought of my responsibility for the situation in which I felt sure she found herself.

A thousand times I took myself to task for that, thinking what I ought and ought not to have done, and then giving myself every bad name and my conduct every damning epithet.

Up and down my cabin I would walk with hands buried in my pockets, revolving these thoughts and working myself up, against my will, to a fever of regret and self-accusation.

Talk about Purgatory—the Purgatory of dear old Father Dan! That was to come after death—mine came before, and by the holy saints, I had enough of it.

Two months passed like this; and when the water of the Sound was open and our ship did not appear, mine was not the only heart that was eating itself out, for the spirits of my shipmates had also begun to sink.

In the early part of the Antarctic spring there had been a fearful hurricane lasting three days on the sea, with a shrieking, roaring chorus of fiends outside, and the conviction now forced itself on my men that our ship must have gone down in the storm.

Of course I fought this notion hard, for my last hopes were based on not believing it. But when after the lapse of weeks I could hold out no longer, and we were confronted by the possibility of being held there another year (for how were our friends to know before the ice formed again that it was necessary to send relief?), I faced the situation firmly—measuring out our food and putting the men on shortened rations, twenty-eight ounces each and a thimbleful of brandy.

By the Lord God it is a fearful thing to stand face to face with slow death. Some of my shipmates could scarcely bear it. The utter solitude, the sight of the same faces and the sound of the same voices, with the prospect of nothing else, seemed to drive most of them nearly mad.

There was no sing-songing among them now, and what speaking I overheard was generally about the great dinners they had eaten, or about their dreams, which were usually of green fields and flower-beds and primroses and daisies—daisies, by heaven, in a world that was like a waste!

As for me I did my best to play the game of never giving up. It was a middling hard game, God knows, and after weeks of waiting a sense of helplessness settled down on me such as I had never known before.

I am not what is called a religious man, but when I thought of my darling's danger (for such I was sure it was) and how I was cut off from her by thousands of miles of impassable sea, there came an overwhelming longing to go with my troubles to somebody stronger than myself.

I found it hard to do that at first, for a feeling of shame came over me, and I thought:

"You coward, you forgot all about God when things were going well with you, but now that they are tumbling down, and death seems certain, you whine and want to go where you never dreamt of going in your days of ease and strength."

I got over that, though—there's nothing except death a man doesn't get over down there—and a dark night came when (the ice breaking from the cliffs of the Cape with a sound that made me think of my last evening at Castle Raa) I found myself folding my hands and praying to the God of my childhood, not for myself but for my dear one, that He before whom the strongest of humanity were nothing at all, would take her into His Fatherly keeping.

"Help her! Help her! *I* can do no more."

It was just when I was down to that extremity that it pleased Providence to come to my relief. The very next morning I was awakened out of my broken sleep by the sound of a gun, followed by such a yell from Treacle as was enough to make you think the sea-serpent had got hold of his old buttocks.

"The ship! The ship! Commander! Commander! The ship! The ship!"

And, looking out of my little window I saw him, with six or seven other members of our company, half naked, just as they had leapt out of their bunks, running like savages to the edge of the sea, where the "Scotia," with all flags flying (God bless and preserve her!), was steaming slowly up through a grinding pack of broken ice.

What a day that was! What shouting! What hand-shaking! For O'Sullivan it was Donnybrook Fair with the tail of his coat left out, and for Treacle it was Whitechapel Road with "What cheer, old cock?" and an unquenchable desire to stand treat all round.

But what I chiefly remember is that the moment I awoke, and before the idea that we were saved and about to go home had been fully grasped by my hazy brain, the thought flashed to my mind:

"Now you'll hear of *her!*"

M. C.

[End of Martin Conrad's Memorandum]

NINETY-FIFTH CHAPTER

THE door of No. 10 was opened by a rather uncomely woman of perhaps thirty years of age, with a weak face and watery eyes.

This was Mrs. Oliver, and it occurred to me even at that first sight that she had the frightened and evasive look of a wife who lives under the intimidation of a tyrannical husband.

She welcomed me, however, with a warmth that partly dispelled my depression and I followed her into the kitchen.

It was the only room on the ground floor of her house (except a scullery) and it seemed sweet and clean and comfortable, having a table in the middle of the floor, a sofa under the window, a rocking-chair on one side of the fireplace, a swinging baby's cot on the other side, and nothing about it that was not homelike and reassuring, except two large photographs over the mantelpiece of men stripped to the waist and sparring.

"We've been looking for you all day, ma'am, and had nearly give you up," she said.

Then she took baby out of my arms, removed her bonnet and pelisse, lifted her barrow-coat to examine her limbs, asked her age, kissed her on the arms, the neck and the legs, and praised her without measure.

"And what's her name, ma'am?"

"Mary Isabel, but I wish her to be called Isabel."

"Isabel! A beautiful name too! Fit for a angel, ma'am. And she *is* a little angel, bless her! Such rosy cheeks! Such a ducky little mouth! Such blue eyes—blue as the blue-bells in the cemet'ry. She's as pretty as a waxwork, she really is, and any woman in the world might be proud to nurse her."

A young mother is such a weakling that praise of her child (however crude) acts like a charm on her, and in spite of myself I was beginning to feel more at ease, when Mrs. Oliver's husband came downstairs.

He was a short, thick-set man of about thirty-five, with a square chin, a very thick neck and a close-cropped red bullet head, and he was in his stocking feet and shirt-sleeves as if he had been dressing to go out for the evening.

I remember that it flashed upon me—I don't know why—that he had seen me from the window of the room upstairs, driving up in the old man's four-wheeler, and had drawn from that innocent circumstance certain deductions about my character and my capacity to pay.

I must have been right, for as soon as our introduction was over and I had interrupted Mrs. Oliver's praises of my baby's beauty by speaking about material matters, saying the terms were to be four shillings, the man, who had seated himself on the sofa to put on his boots said, in a voice that was like a shot out of a blunderbus:

"Five."

"How'd you mean, Ted?" said Mrs. Oliver, timidly. "Didn't we say four?"

"Five," said the man again, with a still louder volume of voice.

I could see that the poor woman was trembling, but assuming the sweet air of persons who live in a constant state of fear, she said:

"Oh yes. It *was* five, now I remember."

I reminded her that her letter had said four, but she insisted that I must be mistaken, and when I told her I had the letter with me and she could see it if she wished, she said:

"Then it must have been a slip of the pen in a manner of speaking, ma'am. We allus talked of five. Didn't we, Ted?"

"Certainly," said her husband, who was still busy with his boots.

I saw what was going on, and I felt hot and angry, but there seemed to be nothing to do except submit.

"Very well, we'll say five then," I said.

"Paid in advance," said the man, and when I answered that that would suit me very well, he added:

"A month in advance, you know."

By this time I felt myself trembling with indignation, as well as quivering with fear, for while I looked upon all the money I possessed as belonging to baby, to part with almost the whole of it in one moment would reduce me to utter helplessness, so I said, turning to Mrs. Oliver:

"Is that usual?"

It did not escape me that the unhappy woman was constantly studying her husband's face, and when he glanced up at her with a meaning look she answered, hurriedly:

"Oh yes, ma'am, quite usual. All the women in the Row has it. Number five, she has twins and gets a month in hand with both of them. But we'll take four weeks and I can't say no fairer than that, can I?"

"But why?" I asked.

"Well, you see, ma'am, you're . . . you're a stranger to us, and if baby was left on our hands . . . Not as we think you'd leave her chargeable as the saying is, but if you were ever ill, and got a bit back with your payments . . . we being only pore people. . . ."

While the poor woman was floundering on in this way my blood was boiling and I was beginning to ask her if she supposed for one moment that I meant to desert my child, when the man, who had finished the lacing of his boots, rose to his feet, and said:

"You don't want yer baiby to be give over to the Guardians for the sake of a week or two, do you?"

That settled everything. I took out my purse and with a trembling hand laid my last precious sovereign on the table.

A moment or two after this Mr. Oliver, who had put on his coat and a cloth cap, made for the door.

"Evenin', ma'am," he said, and with what grace I could muster I bade him good-bye.

"You aren't a-going to the 'Sun' to-night, are you, Ted?" asked Mrs. Oliver.

"Club," said the man, and the door clashed behind him.

I breathed more freely when he was gone, and his wife (from whose face the look of fear vanished instantly) was like another woman.

"Goodness gracious," she cried, with a kind of haggard hilarity, "where's my head? Me never offering you a cup of tea, and you looking so white after your journey."

I took baby back into my arms while she put on the kettle, set a black tea-pot on the hob to warm, laid a piece of tablecloth and a thick cup and saucer on the end of the table, and then knelt on the fender to toast a little bread, talking meantime (half apologetically and half proudly) about her husband.

He was a bricklayer by trade, and sometimes worked at the cemetery which I could see at the other side of the road (behind the long railings and the tall trees), but was more generally engaged as a sort of fighting lieutenant to a Labour leader whose business it was to get up strikes. Before they were married he had been the "Light Weight Champion of Whitechapel," and those were photos of his fights which I could see over the mantelpiece, but "he never did no knocking of people about now," being "quiet and matrimonual."

In spite of myself my heart warmed to the woman. I wonder it did not occur to me there and then that, living in constant dread of her tyrannical husband, she would always be guilty of the dissimulation I had seen an example of already and that the effect of it would be reflected upon my child.

It did not. I only told myself that she was clearly fond of children and would be a kind nurse to my baby. It even pleased me, in my foolish motherly selfishness, that she was a plain-featured person, whom baby could never come to love as she would, I was sure, love me.

I felt better after I had taken tea, and as it was then seven o'clock, and the sun was setting horizontally through the cypresses of the cemetery, I knew it was time to go.

I could not do that, though, without undressing baby and singing her to sleep. And even then I sat for a while with an aching heart, and Isabel on my knee, thinking of how I should have to go to bed that night, for the first time, without her.

Mrs. Oliver, in the meantime, examining the surplus linen which I had brought in my parcel, was bursting into whispered cries of delight over it, and, being told I had made the clothes myself, was saying:

"What a wonderful seamstress you might be if you liked, ma'am."

At length the time came to leave baby, and no woman knows the pain of that experience who has not gone through it.

Though I really believed my darling would be loved and cared for, and knew she would never miss me, or yet know that I was gone (there was a pang even in that thought, and in every other kind of comforting), I could not help it, that, as I was putting my cherub into her cot, my tears rained down on her little face and awakened her, so that I had to kneel by her side and rock her to sleep again.

"You'll be good to my child, won't you, Mrs. Oliver?" I said.

" 'Deed I will, ma'am," the woman replied.

"You'll bath her every day, will you not?"

"Night and morning. I allus does, ma'am."

"And rinse out her bottle and see that she has nice new milk fresh from the cow?"

"Sure as sure, ma'am. But don't you fret no more about the child, ma'am. I've been a mother myself, ma'am, and I'll be as good to your little angel as if she was my own come back to me."

"God bless you," I said in a burst of anguish, and after remaining a moment longer on my knees by the cot (speaking with all my heart and soul, though neither to nurse nor to baby) I rose to my feet, dashed the tears from my eyes, and ran out of the house.

NINETY-SIXTH CHAPTER

I KNEW that my eyes were not fit to be seen in the streets, so I dropped my dark veil and hurried along, being conscious of nothing for some time except the clang of electric cars and the bustle of passers-by, to whom my poor little sorrow was nothing at all.

But I had not gone far—I think I had not, though my senses were confused and vague—before I began to feel ashamed, to take myself to task, and to ask what I had to cry about.

If I had parted from my baby it was for her own good, and if I had paid away my last sovereign I had provided for her for a month, I had nothing to think of now except myself and how to get work.

I never doubted that I should get work, or that I should get it immediately, the only open question being what work and where.

Hitherto I had thought that, being quick with my pen, I might perhaps become secretary to somebody; but now, remembering the typist's story ("firms don't like it"), and wishing to run no risks in respect of my child, I put that expectation away and began to soar to higher things.

How vain they were! Remembering some kind words the Reverend Mother had said about me at the convent (where I had taken more prizes than Alma, though I had never mentioned it before) I told myself that I, too, was an educated woman. I knew Italian, French and German, and having heard that some women could make a living by translating books for publishers I thought I might do the same.

Nay, I could even write books myself. I was sure I could—one book at all events, about friendless girls who have to face the world for themselves, and all good women would read it (some good men also), because they would see that it must be true.

Oh, how vain were my thoughts! Yet in another sense they were not all vanity, for I was not thinking of fame, or what people would say about what I should write, but only what I should get for it.

I should get money, not a great deal perhaps, yet enough for baby and me, that we might have that cottage in the country, covered with creepers and roses, where Isabel would run about the grass by and by, and pluck the flowers in the garden.

"So what have *you* got to cry about, you ridiculous thing," I thought while I hurried along, with a high step now, as if my soul had been in my feet.

But a mother's visions of the future are like a mirage (always gleaming with the fairy palaces which her child is to inhabit some day), and I am not the first to find her shadows fade away.

I must have been walking for some time, feeling no weariness at all, when I came to the bridge by Bow Church. There I had intended to take a tram, but not being tired I went on farther, thinking every stage I could walk would be so much money to the good.

I was deep in the Mile End Road, when a chilling thought came to me. It was the thought of the distance that would divide me from my child, making my visits to her difficult, and putting it out of my power to reach her quickly (perhaps even to know in time) if, as happened to children, she became suddenly and dangerously ill.

I remembered the long line of telescoping thoroughfares I had passed through earlier in the day (with their big hospitals, their big breweries, their big tabernacles, their workmen's lodging-houses, their Cinema picture palaces, their Jewish theatres, and their numberless public houses); and then the barrier of squalid space which would divide me from baby, if I obtained employment in the West End, seemed to be immeasurably greater and more frightening than the space that had divided me from Martin when he was at the other end of the world.

Not all the allurements of my dream were sufficient to reconcile me to such a dangerous separation.

"It's impossible," I thought. "Quite impossible."

Insensibly my rapid footsteps slackened. When I reached that part of the Mile End Road in which the Jewish tailors live, and found myself listening to a foreign language which I afterwards knew to be Yiddish, and looking at men with curls at each side of their sallow faces, slithering along as if they were wearing eastern slippers without heels, I stopped, without knowing why, at the corner of a street where an Italian organ-man was playing while a number of bright-eyed Jewish children danced.

I was still looking on, hardly thinking of what I saw, when my eyes fell on an advertisement, pasted on the window of a sausage-and-ham shop at the corner. In large written characters it ran:

Seamstress Wanted. Good Wages.
Apply No. — Washington Street.

How little are the things on which our destiny seems to hang! In a moment I was remembering what Mrs. Oliver had said about my being a good seamstress; and, almost before I knew what I was about, I was hurrying up the side street and knocking with my knuckles at an open door.

A rather fat and elderly Jewess, covered with rings and gold chains, and wearing a manifest black wig, came from a room at one side of the lobby. I explained my errand, and after she had looked me over in a sort of surprise, as if I had not been the kind of person she expected, she said, in a nasal and guttural voice:

"Vait! My daughter, she speaks very vell Ainglish."

Then turning her head over her shoulder, she pitched her voice several octaves higher and cried, "Miriam," whereupon there came tripping downstairs a Jewish girl of about eighteen, with large black eyes, thick black hair, and such a dear good face.

I repeated my application, and after the girl had interpreted my request to her mother, I was asked into the lobby, and put through a kind of catechism.

Was I a seamstress? No, but I wished to become one. Had I aiver vorked on vaistcoats? I hadn't, but I could do anything with my needle.

Perhaps the urgency of my appeal, and more probably the pressure of her own need, weighed with the Jewess, for after reflection, and an eager whisper from her daughter (who was looking at me with kindling eyes), she said,

"Very vell, ve'll see what she can do."

I was then taken into a close and stuffy room where a number of girls (all Jewish as I could see) were working on sections of waistcoats which, lying about on every side, looked like patterns for legs of mutton. One girl was basting, another was pressing, and a third was sewing button-holes with a fine silk twist round bars of gimp.

This last was the work which was required of me, and I was told to look and see if I could do it. I watched the girl for a moment and then said:

"Let me try."

Needle and twist and one of the half vests were then given to me, and after ten minutes I had worked my first button-hole and handed it back.

The daughter praised it warmly, but the mother said:

"Very fair, but a leedle slow."

"Let me try again," I said, and my trembling fingers were so eager to please that my next button-hole was not only better but more quickly made.

"Beautiful!" said the daughter. "And mamma, only think, she's quicker than Leah, already. I timed them."

"I muz call your vader, dough," said the Jewess, and she disappeared through the doorway.

While I stood talking to the younger Jewess, who had, I could see, formed as quick an attachment for me as I for her, I heard another nasal and guttural voice (a man's) coming towards us from the hall.

"Is she von of our people?"

"Nein! She's a Skihoah"—meaning, as I afterwards learned, a non-Jewish girl.

Then a tall, thin Jew entered the room behind the elderly Jewess. I had never before and have never since seen such a patriarchal figure. With his long grey beard and solemn face he might have stood for Moses in one of the pictures that used to hang on the walls of the convent—except for his velvet skull-cap and the black alpaca apron, which was speckled over with fluffy bits of thread and scraps of cloth and silk.

He looked at me for a moment with his keen eyes, and after his wife had shown him my work, and he had taken a pinch of snuff and blown his nose on a coloured handkerchief with the sound of a trumpet, he put me through another catechism.

I was trembling lest he should make intimate inquiries, but beyond asking my name, and whether I was a Christian, he did not concern himself with personal questions.

"Vat vages do you vant?" he asked.

I told him I should be pleased to take whatever was paid to other girls doing work of the same kind.

"Ach no! Dese girls are full-timers. You are only a greener [meaning a beginner] so you vill not expect anything like so much."

At that his daughter repeated her assurance that I was quicker than the girl she had called Leah; but the Jew, with an air of parental majesty, told her to be silent, and then said that as I was an "improver" he could only take me "on piece," naming the price (a very small one) per half-dozen buttons and buttonholes, with the condition that I found my own twist and did the work in my own home.

Seeing that I should be no match for the Jew at a bargain, and being so eager to get to work at any price, I closed with his offer, and then he left the room, after telling me to come back the next day.

"And vhere do you lif, my dear?" said the Jewess.

I told her Bayswater, making some excuse for being in the East End, and getting as near to the truth as I dare venture, but feeling instinctively, after my sight of the master of the house, that I dared say nothing about my child.

She told me I must live nearer to my work, and I said that was exactly what I wished to do—asking if she knew where I could find a room.

Fortunately the Jewess herself had two rooms vacant at that moment, and we went upstairs to look at them.

Both were at the top of the house, and one of them I could have for two shillings a week, but it was dark and cheerless, being at the back and looking into the space over the yards in which the tenants dried their washing on lines stretched from pulleys.

The other, which would cost a shilling a week more, was a lean slit of a room, very sparsely furnished, but it was to the front, and looked down into the varied life of the street, so I took it instantly and asked when I could move in.

"Ven you like," said the Jewess. "Everyding is ready."

So, early next morning I bade farewell to my good Welsh landlady (who looked grave when I told her what I was going to do) and to Emmerjane (who cried when I kissed her smudgy face) and, taking possession of my new home, began work immediately in my first and only employment.

Perhaps it was a deep decline after the splendours of my dreams, but I did not allow myself to think about that. I was near to Ilford and I could go to see Isabel every day.

Isabel! Isabel! Isabel! Everything was Isabel, for now that Martin was gone my hopes and my fears, my love and my life, revolved on one axis only—my child.

NINETY-SEVENTH CHAPTER

My employer was a Polish Jew, named Israel Abramovitch.

He had come to England at the time of the religious persecution in the Holy Cities of Russia, set himself up in his trade as a tailor in a garret in Whitechapel, hired a "Singer," worked with "green" labour for "slop" warehouses, and become in less than twenty years the richest foreign Jew in the East End of London, doing some of the "best bespoke" work for the large shops in the West and having the reputation (as I afterwards found) of being the greatest of Jewish "sweaters."

In spite of this, however, he was in his own way a deeply religious man. Strict, severe, almost superstitious in obeying the Levitical laws and in practising the sad and rather gloomy symbolism of his faith. A famous Talmudist, a pillar of the synagogue, one of the two wardens of the Chevra in Brick Lane, and consequently a great upholder of moral rectitude.

His house seemed to be a solid mass of human beings, chiefly Jewish girls, who worked all day, and sometimes (when regulations could be evaded or double gangs engaged) all night, for the Jew drove everybody at high speed, not excepting his wife, who cooked the food and pressed the clothes at the same time.

In this hive of industry I needed no spur to make me work.

Every morning Mrs. Abramovitch brought up a thick pile of vests to my room, and every evening she took them down again, after counting my earnings with almost preternatural rapidity and paying me, day by day, with unfailing promptitude.

At the end of my first week I found I had made ten shillings. I was delighted, but after I had paid for my room and my food there was not enough for baby's board, so the second week I worked later in the evenings, and earned fourteen shillings. This was still insufficient, therefore I determined to take something from the other end of the day.

"Morning will be better," I thought, remembering the painful noises at night, especially about midnight, when people were being thrown out of a public-house higher up the street, where there was a placard in the window saying the ale sold there could be guaranteed to "make anybody drunk for fourpence."

Unfortunately (being a little weak) I was always heavy in the mornings, but by great luck my room faced the east, so I conceived the idea of moving my bed up to the window and drawing my blinds to the top so that the earliest light might fall on my face and waken me.

This device succeeded splendidly, and for many weeks of the late summer and early autumn I was up before the sun, as soon as the dawn had broadened and while the leaden London daylight was filtering through the smoke of yesterday.

By this means I increased my earnings to sixteen shillings, and, as my fingers learned to fly over their work, to seventeen and even eighteen.

That was my maximum, and though it left a narrow margin for other needs it enabled me at the end of a month to pay another pound for baby's board and to put away a little towards her "shortening," which Mrs. Oliver was always saying must be soon.

I had to stick close to maintain this average, and I grudged even the time occupied in buying and eating my food, though that was not a long process in the Mile End Road, which is full of shops where things can be bought ready cooked. After the first week I did not even need to go out for them, for they were brought round to my room every morning, thus enabling me to live without leaving my work.

It was a stiff life, perhaps, but let nobody think I looked upon myself as a slave. Though I worked so hard I felt no self-pity. The thought that I was working for my child sweetened all my labours. It was such a joy to think that baby depended upon me for everything she wanted.

Being so happy in those days I sang a great deal, though naturally not in the middle of the day, when our house was going like a mill-wheel, but in the early mornings before the electric trams began to clang, or the hawkers with their barrows to shout, and when there was no sound even in the East End except that ceaseless tramp, tramp, tramp in the front street which always made me think of the children of Israel in Egypt drawing burdens for Pharaoh.

Throwing open my window I sang all sorts of things, but, being such a child myself and so fond of make-believe, I loved best to sing my lullaby, and so pretend that baby was with me in my room, lying asleep behind me in my bed.

"Sleep, little baby, I love thee, I love thee,
Sleep, little Queen, I am bending above thee."

I never knew that I had any other audience than a lark in a cage on the other side of the street (perhaps I was in a cage myself, though I did not think of that then) which always started singing when I sang, except the washerwomen from a Women's Shelter going off at four to their work at the West End, and two old widows opposite who sewed Bibles and stitched cassocks, which being (so Miriam told me) the worst-paid of all sweated labour compelled them to be up as early as myself.

It was not a very hopeful environment, yet for some time, in my little top room, I was really happy.

I saw baby every day. Between six and nine every night, I broke off work to go to Ilford, saying nothing about my errand to anybody, and leaving the family of the Jew to think it was my time for recreation.

Generally I "trammed" it from Bow Church, because I was so eager to get to my journey's end, but usually I returned on foot, for though the distance was great I thought I slept better for the walk.

What joyful evenings those were!

Perhaps I was not altogether satisfied about the Olivers, but that did not matter very much. On closer acquaintance I found my baby's nurse to be a "heedless" and "feckless" woman; and though I told myself that all allowances must be made for her in having a bad husband, I knew in my secret heart that I was deceiving myself, and that I ought to listen to the voices that were saying "Your child is being neglected."

Sometimes it seemed to me that baby had not been bathed—but that only gave me an excuse for bathing her myself.

Sometimes I thought her clothes were not as clean as they might be—but that only gave me the joy of washing them.

Sometimes I was sure that her feeding-bottle had not been rinsed and her milk was not quite fresh—but that only gave me the pleasure of scalding the one and boiling the other.

More than once it flashed upon me that I was paying Mrs. Oliver to do all this—but then what a deep delight it was to be mothering my own baby!

Thus weeks and months passed—it is only now I know how many, for in those days Time itself had nothing in it for me except my child—and every new day brought the new joy of watching my baby's development.

Oh, how wonderful it all was! To see her little mind and soul coming out of the Unknown! Out of the silence and darkness of the womb into the world of light and sound!

First her sense of sight, with her never-ending interest in her dear little toes! Then her senses of touch and hearing, and the gift of speech, beginning with a sort of crow, and ending in the "ma-ma-ma" which the first time I heard it went prancing through and through me and was more heavenly to my ears than the music of the spheres!

What evenings of joy I had with her!

The best of them (God forgive me!) were the nights when the bricklayer had got into some trouble by "knocking people about" at the "Rising Sun" and his wife had to go off to rescue him from the police.

Then, baby being "shortened," I would prop her up in her cot while I sang "Sally" to her; or if that did not serve, and her little lip continued to drop, I both sang and danced, spreading my skirts and waltzing to the tune of "Clementina" while the kettle hummed over the fire and the bricklayer's kitchen buzzed softly like a hive of bees.

Oh dear! Oh dear! I may have been down in the depths, yet there is no place so dark that it may not be brightened by a sunbeam, and my sunbeam was my child.

And then Martin—baby was constantly making me think of him. Devouring her with my eyes, I caught resemblances every day—in her eyes, her voice, her smile, and, above all, in that gurgling laugh that was like water bubbling out of a bottle.

I used to talk to her about him, pouring all my sentimental secrets into her ears, just as if she understood, telling her what a great man her father had been and how he loved both of us—*would* have done if he had lived longer.

I dare say it was very foolish. Yet I cannot think it was all foolishness. Many and many a time since I have wondered if the holy saints, who knew what had really happened to Martin, were whispering all this in my ear as a means of keeping my love for him as much alive as if he had been constantly by my side.

The climax came when Isabel was about five months old, for then the feeling about baby and Martin reached another and higher phase.

I hardly dare to speak of it, lest it should seem silly when it was really so sacred and so exalted.

The idea I had had before baby was born, that she was being sent to console me (to be a link between my lost one and me), developed into the startling and rapturous thought that the very soul of Martin had passed into my child.

"So Martin is not dead at all," I thought, "not really dead, because he lives in baby."

It is impossible to say how this thought stirred me; how it filled my heart with thankfulness; how I prayed that the little body in which the soul of my Martin had come to dwell might grow beautiful and strong and worthy of him; how I felt charged with another and still greater responsibility to guard and protect her with my life itself if need be.

"Yes, yes, my very life itself," I thought.

Perhaps this was a sort of delirium, born of my great love, my hard work, and my failing strength. I did not know, I did not care.

All that mattered to me then was one thing only—that whereas hitherto I had thought Martin was so far gone from me that not Time but only Eternity would bring us together, now I felt that he was coming back and back to me—nearer and nearer and nearer every day.

MEMORANDUM BY MARTIN CONRAD

My dear, noble little woman was right in more ways than she knew.

At that very time I was in literal truth hurrying home to her as fast as the fastest available vessel could carry me.

As soon as we had boarded the *Scotia* at the Cape and greeted our old shipmates, we shouted for our letters.

There were some for all of us and heaps for me, so I scuttled down to my cabin, where I sorted the envelopes like a pack of cards, looking for the small delicate hand that used to write my letters and speeches.

To my dismay it was not there, and realizing that fact I bundled the letters into a locker and never looked at them again until we were two days out—when I found they were chiefly congratulations from my committee, the proprietor of my newspaper, and the Royal Geographical Society, all welcome enough in their way, but Dead Sea fruit to a man with an empty, heaving heart.

Going up on deck I found every face about me shining like the aurora, for the men had had good news all round, one having come into a fortune and another into the fatherhood of twins, and both being in a state of joy and excitement.

But all the good fellows were like boys. Some of them (with laughter seasoned by a few tears) read me funny bits out of their wives' letters—bits too that were not funny, about having "a pretty fit of hysterics" at reading bad news of us and "wanting to kiss the newsboy" when he brought the paper contradicting it.

I did my best to play the game of rejoicing, pretending I had had good news also, and everything was going splendid. But I found it hard enough to keep it going, especially while we were sailing back to the world, as we called it, and hearing from the crew the news of what had happened while we had been away.

First, there was the reason for the delay in the arrival of the ship, which had been due not to failure of the wireless at our end, but to a breakdown on Macquarie Island.

And then there was the account of the report of the loss of the *Scotia* in the gale going out, which had been believed on insufficient evidence (as I thought), but recorded in generous words of regret that sent the blood boiling to a man's face and made him wish to heaven they could be true.

We were only five or six days sailing to New Zealand, but the strain to me was terrible, for the thought was always uppermost:

"Why didn't she write a word of welcome to reach me on my return to civilisation?"

When I was not talking to somebody that question was constantly haunting me. To escape from it I joined the sports of my shipmates, who with joyful news in their hearts and fresh food in their stomachs were feeling as good as new in spite of all they had suffered.

But the morning we smelt land, the morning the cloud banks above the eastern horizon came out hard and fast and sure (no dreamland this time), I stood at the ship's bow, saying nothing to anybody, only straining my eyes for the yet distant world we were coming back to out of that desolate white waste, and thinking:

"Surely I'll have news from her before nightfall."

There was a big warm-hearted crowd on the pier at Port Lyttelton. Treacle said, "Gawd, I didn't know there was so many people in the world, Guv'nor;'' and O'Sullivan, catching sight of a pretty figure under a sunshade, tugged at my arm and cried (in the voice of an astronomer who has discovered a planet), ''Commanther! Commanther! A *girl!*''

Almost before we had been brought to, a company of scientific visitors came aboard; but I was more concerned about the telegrams that had come at the same moment, so hurrying down to my cabin I tore them open like a vulture riving its prey—always looking at the signatures first and never touching an envelope without thinking:

''Oh God, what will be inside of it?''

There was nothing from my dear one! Invitations to dine, to lecture, to write books, to do this and that and Heaven knows what, but never a word from her who was more to me than all the world besides.

This made me more than ever sure of the ''voices'' that had called me back from the 88th latitude, so I decided instantly to leave our ship in New Zealand, in readiness for our next effort, and getting across to Sydney to take the first fast steamer home.

The good people at Port Lyttelton were loath to let us go. But after I had made my excuses, (''crazy to get back to wives and sweethearts, you know'') they sent a school of boys (stunning little chaps in Eton suits) to sing us off with ''Forty Years On''—which brought more of my mother into my eyes than I knew to be left there.

At Sydney we had the same experience—the same hearty crowds, the same welcome, the same invitations, to which we made the same replies, and then got away by a fast liner which happened to be ready to sail.

On the way ''back to the world'' I had slung together a sort of a despatch for the newspaper which had promoted our expedition (a lame, limping thing for want of my darling's help to make it go), saying something about the little we had been able to do but more about what we meant, please God, to do some day.

''She'll see that, anyway, and know we're coming back,'' I thought.

But to make doubly sure I sent two personal telegrams, one to my dear one at Castle Raa and the other to my old people at home, asking for answers to Port Said.

Out on the sea again I was tormented by the old dream of the crevassed glacier; and if anybody wonders why a hulking chap who had not been afraid of a ninety-mile blizzard in the region of the Pole allowed himself to be kept awake at night by a buzzing in the brain, all I can say is that it was so, and I know nothing more about it.

Perhaps my recent experience with the "wireless" persuaded me that if two sticks stuck in the earth could be made to communicate with each other over hundreds of miles, two hearts that loved each other knew no limitations of time or space.

In any case I was now so sure that my dear one had called me home from the Antarctic that by the time we reached Port Said, and telegrams were pouring in on me, I had worked myself up to such a fear that I dared not open them.

From sheer dread of the joy or sorrow that might be enclosed in the yellow covers, I got O'Sullivan down in my cabin to read my telegrams, while I scanned his face and nearly choked with my own tobacco smoke.

There was nothing from my dear one! Nothing from my people at home either!

O'Sullivan got it into his head that I was worrying about my parents, and tried to comfort me by saying that old folks never dreamt of telegraphing, but by the holy immaculate Mother he'd go bail there would be a letter for me before long.

There was.

We stayed two eternal days at Port Said while the vessel was taking coal for the rest of the voyage, and almost at the moment of sailing a letter arrived from Ellan, which, falling into O'Sullivan's hands first, sent him flying through the steamer and shouting at the top of his voice:

"Commanther! Commanther!"

The passengers gave room for him, and told me afterwards of his beaming face. And when he burst into my cabin I too felt sure he had brought me good news, which he had, though it was not all that I wanted.

"The way I was sure there would be a letter for you soon, and by the holy St. Patrick and St. Thomas, here it is," he cried.

The letter was from my father, and I had to brace myself before I could read it.

It was full of fatherly love, motherly love, too, and the extravagant pride my dear good old people had of me ("everybody's talking of you, my boy, and there's nothing else in the newspapers''); but not a word about my Mary—or only one, and that seemed worse than none at all.

''You must have heard of the trouble at Castle Raa. Very sad, but this happy hour is not the time to say anything about it.''

Nothing more! Only reams and reams of sweet parental chatter which (God forgive me!) I would have gladly given over and over again for one plain sentence about my darling.

Being now more than ever sure that some kind of catastrophe had overtaken my poor little woman, I telegraphed to her again, this time (without knowing what mischief I was making) at the house of Daniel O'Neill—telling myself that, though the man was a brute who had sacrificed his daughter to his lust of rank and power and all the rest of his rotten aspirations, he was her father, and, if her reprobate of a husband had turned her out, he must surely have taken her in.

''Cable reply to Malta. Altogether too bad not hearing from you,'' I said.

A blind, hasty, cruel telegram, but thank God she never received it! M. C.

[End of Martin Conrad's Memorandum]

NINETY-EIGHTH CHAPTER

Day by day it became more and more difficult for me to throw dust in my own eyes about the Olivers.

One evening on reaching their house a little after six, as usual, I found the front door open, the kitchen empty save for baby, who, sitting up in her cot, was holding quiet converse with her toes, and the two Olivers talking loudly (probably by pre-arrangement) in the room upstairs.

The talk was about baby, which was ''a noosance,'' interfering with a man's sleep by night and driving him out of his home by day. And how much did they get for it? Nothing, in a manner of speaking. What did the woman (meaning me) think the ''bleedin' place'' was—''a philanthropic institooshun'' or a ''charity orginisation gime''?

After this I heard the bricklayer thunder downstairs in his heavy boots and go out of the house without coming into the kitchen, leaving his wife (moral coward that he was) to settle his account with me.

Then Mrs. Oliver came down, with many sighs, expressed surprise at seeing me and fear that I might have overheard what had been said in the room above.

"Sorry to say I've been having a few words with Ted, ma'am, and tell you the truth it was about you."

Ted had always been against her nursing, and she must admit it wasn't wise of a woman to let her man go to the public-house to get out of the way of a crying child; but though she was a-running herself off her feet to attend to the pore dear, and milk was up a penny, she had growd that fond of my baby since she lost her own that she couldn't abear to part with the jewel, and perhaps if I could pay a little more—Ted said seven, but she said six, and a shilling a week wouldn't hurt me—she could over-persuade him to let the dear precious stay.

I was trembling with indignation while I listened to the woman's whining (knowing well I was being imposed upon), but I was helpless and so I agreed.

My complacency had a bad effect on the Olivers, who continued to make fresh extortions, until their demands almost drove me to despair.

I thought a climax had been reached when one night a neighbour came to the door and, calling Mrs. Oliver into the lobby, communicated some news in a whisper which brought her back with a frightened face for her cloak and hat, saying "something was a matter with Ted" and she must "run away quick to him."

When she returned an hour or two later she was crying, and with sobs between her words she told me that Ted (having taken a drop too much) had "knocked somebody about" at the "Sun." As a consequence he had fallen into the hands of the police, and would be brought before the magistrate the following morning, when, being unable to pay the fine, he would have to "do time"—just as a strike was a-coming on, too, and he was expecting good pay from the Strike Committee.

"And what is to happen to me and the baby while my 'usband is in prison?" she said.

I knew it was an act of weakness, but, thinking of my child and the danger of its being homeless, I asked what the amount of the fine would probably be, and being told ten-and-six, I gave the money, though it was nearly all I had in the world.

I paid for my weakness, though, and have reason to remember it.

The extortions of the Olivers had brought me to so narrow a margin between my earnings and expenses that I lay awake nearly all that night thinking what I could do to increase the one or reduce the other. The only thing I found possible was to change to cheaper quarters. So next morning, with a rather heavy heart, I asked Mrs. Abramovitch if the room at the back of the house was still empty, and hearing that it was I moved into it the same day.

That was a small and not a very wise economy.

My new room was cheerless as well as dark, with no sights but the clothes that were drying from the pulley-lines and no sounds but the whoops of the boys of the neighbourhood playing at "Red Indians" on the top of the yard walls.

But it was about the same as the other in size and furniture, and after I had decorated it with my few treasures—the Reverend Mother's rosary, which I hung on the head of the bed, and my darling mother's miniature, which I pinned up over the fire—I thought it looked bright and homelike.

All this time, too, I was between the nether and the upper mill-stone.

My employer, the Jew (though he must have seen that I was sweating myself much more than the law would have allowed him to sweat me), could not forgive himself when he found that I was earning more by "piece" than he would have had to pay me by the day, or resist the temptation to square accounts with me at the earliest possible opportunity.

Unfortunately, his opportunity came only too quickly, and it led (however indirectly) to the most startling fact that has ever, perhaps, entered into a woman's life.

I had not been more than three months at the Jew's house when the Jewish festivals came round—New Year's Day, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles—which, falling near together and occupying many days, disturbed his own habits of work entirely.

One of the tasks he reserved for himself was that of taking the best paid of his "best-bespoke" back to the large shops in the West End, and waiting for the return orders. But finding that the festivals interfered with these journeys, he decided that they should be made by me, who was supposed to know the West End (having lived in it) and to present a respectable appearance.

I was reluctant to undertake the new duty, for though the Jew was to pay me a few shillings a week for it, I saw I could earn more in the time with my needle. But when he laid his long, hairy forefinger on the side of his nose and said with a significant smile:

"You vill be gradeful, and convenience your employer, mine child," I agreed.

Thus it came to pass that not only during the Jewish festivals, but for months after they were over, I carried a rather large black bag by tram or rail to the district that lies at the back of Piccadilly and along Oxford Street as far west as the Marble Arch.

I had to go whenever called upon and to wait as long as wanted, so that in the height of the tailoring season I was out in the West End at all irregular hours of night, and even returned to my lodgings on one or two occasions in the raw sunshine of the early mornings.

The one terror of my West End journeys was that I might meet Sister Mildred. I never did. In the multitude of faces which passed through the streets, flashing and disappearing like waves under the moon at sea, I never once caught a glimpse of a face I knew.

But what sights I saw for all that! What piercing, piteous proofs that between the rich and the poor there is a great gulf fixed!

The splendid carriages driving in and out of the Park; the sumptuously dressed ladies strolling through Bond Street; the fashionable church paraders; the white plumes and diamond stars which sometimes gleamed behind the glow of the electric broughams gliding down the Mall.

"I used to be a-toffed up like that onct," I heard an old woman who was selling matches say as a lady in an ermine coat stepped out of a theatre into an automobile and was wrapped round in a tiger-skin rug.

Sometimes it happened that, returning to the East End after the motor 'buses had ceased to ply, I had to slip through the silent Leicester Square and the empty Strand to the Underground Railway on the Embankment.

Then I would see the wretched men and women who were huddled together in the darkness on the steps to the river (whose ever-flowing waters must have witnessed so many generations of human wreckage), and, glancing up at the big hotels and palatial mansions full of ladies newly returned from theatres and restaurants in their satin slippers and silk stockings, I would wonder how they could lie in their white beds at night in rooms whose windows looked down on such scenes.

But the sight that stirred me most (though it did not awaken my charity, which shows what a lean-souled thing I was myself) was that of the "public women," the street-walkers, as I used to call them, whom I saw in Piccadilly with their fine clothes and painted faces, sauntering in front of the clubs or tripping along with a light step and trying to attract the attention of the men.

I found no pathos in the position of such women. On the contrary, I had an unspeakable horror and hatred and loathing of them, feeling that no temptation, no poverty, no pressure that could ever be brought to bear upon a woman in life or in death excused her for committing so great a wrong on the sanctity of her sex as to give up her womanhood at any call but that of love.

"Nothing could make me do it," I used to think, "nothing in this world."

But O God! how little I knew then what is in a woman's heart to do when she has a child to live for, and is helpless and alone!

I cannot expect anybody to forgive me for what *I* did (or attempted to do), and now that the time has come to tell of it my hand trembles, and body and soul seem to be quivering like a flame.

May God (who has brought everything to such a glorious end) have mercy on me and forgive me, and help me to be true!

NINETY-NINTH CHAPTER

The worst consequence of my West End journeys was that my nightly visits to Ilford were fewer than before, and that the constant narrowing of the margin between my income and my expenses made it impossible for me to go there during the day.

As a result my baby received less and less attention, and I could not be blind to the fact that she was growing paler and thinner.

At length she developed a cough which troubled me a great deal. Mrs. Oliver made light of it, saying a few pennyworths of paregoric would drive it away, so I hurried off to a chemist, who recommended a soothing syrup of his own, saying it was safer and more effectual for a child.

The syrup seemed to stop the cough but to disturb the digestion, for I saw the stain of curdled milk on baby's bib and was conscious of her increasing weakness.

This alarmed me very much, and little as I knew of children's ailments, I became convinced that she stood in need of more fresh air, so I entreated Mrs. Oliver to take her for a walk every day.

I doubt if she ever did so, for as often as I would say:

"Has baby been out to-day, nurse?" Mrs. Oliver would make some lame excuse and pass quickly to another subject.

At last, being unable to bear the strain any longer, I burst out on the woman with bitter reproaches, and then she broke down into tears and explained everything. She was behind with her rent, the landlord was threatening, and she dared not leave the house for a moment lest he should lock her out altogether.

"I don't mind telling you, it's all along of Ted, ma'am. He's on strike wages but he spends it at the 'Sun.' He has never been the man to me—never once since I married him. I could work and keep the house comfortable without him, but he wouldn't let me a-be, because he knows I love him dear. Yes, I do, I love him dear," she continued, breaking into hysterical sobs, "and if he came home and killed me I could kiss him with my last breath."

This touched me more than I can say. A sense of something tragic in the position of the poor woman, who knew the character of the man she loved as well as the weakness which compelled her to love him, made me sympathise with her for the first time, and think (with a shuddering memory of my own marriage) how many millions of women there must be in the world who were in a worse position than myself.

On returning to my room that night I began to look about to see if I had anything I could sell in order to help Mrs. Oliver, and so put an end to the condition that kept my baby a prisoner in her house.

I had nothing, or next to nothing. Except the Reverend Mother's rosary (worth no more than three or four shillings) I had only my mother's miniature, which was framed in gold and set in pearls, but that was the most precious of all my earthly possessions except my child.

Again and again when I looked at it in my darkest hours I had found new strength and courage. It had been like a shrine to me—what the image of the Virgin was in happier days—and thinking of all that my darling mother had done and suffered and sacrificed for my sake when I was myself a child, I felt that I could never part with her picture under the pressure of any necessity whatever.

"Never," I thought, "never under any circumstances."

It must have been about a week after this that I went to Ilford on one of those chill, clammy nights which seem peculiar to the East End of London, where the atmosphere, compounded of smoke and fog and thin drizzling rain, penetrates to the bone and hangs on one's shoulders like a shroud.

Thinking of this, as I thought of everything, in relation to baby, I bought, as I was passing a hosier's shop, a pair of nice warm stockings and a little woollen jacket.

When I reached the Olivers' I found, to my surprise, two strange men stretched out at large in the kitchen, one on the sofa and the other in the rocking-chair, both smoking strong tobacco and baby coughing constantly.

Before I realised what had happened Mrs. Oliver called me into the scullery, and, after closing the door on us, she explained the position, in whispers broken by sobs.

It was the rent. These were the bailiff's men put into possession by the landlord, and unless she could find two pounds ten by nine o'clock to-morrow morning, she and her husband would be sold up and turned into the street.

"The home as I've been scraping and pinching to keep together!" she cried. "For the sake of two pound ten! . . . You couldn't lend us that much, could you?"

I told her I could not, but she renewed her entreaties, asking me to think if I had not something I could pawn for them, and saying that Ted and she would consider it "a sacred dooty" to repay.

Again I told her I had nothing—I was trying not to think of the miniature—but just at that moment she caught sight of the child's jacket which I was still holding in my hand, and she fell on me with bitter reproaches.

"You've money enough to spend on baby, though. It's crool. Her living in lukshry and getting new milk night and day, and fine clothes being bought for her constant, and my pore Ted without a roof to cover him in weather same as this. It breaks my heart. It do indeed. Take your child away, ma'am. Take her to-night, afore we're turned out of house and home to-morrow morning."

Before the hysterical cries with which Mrs. Oliver said this had come to an end I was on my way back to my room at the Jew's. But it was baby I was thinking of in relation to that cold, clammy night—that it would be impossible to take her out in it (even if I had somewhere to take her to, which I had not) without risk to her health and perhaps her life.

With trembling fingers and an awful pain at my heart I took my mother's miniature from the wall and wrapped it up in tissue paper.

A few minutes afterwards I was back in the damp streets, walking fast and eagerly, cutting over the lines of the electric trams without looking for the crossings.

I knew where I was going to—I was going to a pawnbroker's in the Mile End Waste which I had seen on my West End journeys. When I got there I stole in at a side door, half-closing my eyes as I did so, by that strange impulse which causes us to see nothing when we do not wish to be seen.

I shall never forget the scene inside. I think it must have left a scar on my brain, for I see it now in every detail—the little dark compartment; the high counter; the shelves at the back full of parcels, like those of a left-luggage room at a railway station; the heavy, baggy, big-faced man in shirt-sleeves with a long cigar held between his teeth at the corner of his frothy mouth; and then my own hurried breathing; my thin fingers opening the tissue paper and holding out the miniature; the man's coarse hands fumbling it; his casual air as he looked at it and cheapened it, as if it had been a common thing scarcely worthy of consideration.

"What's this 'ere old-fashion'd thing? Portrait of your great-grandmother? Hum! Not 'arf bad-looking fice, neither."

I think my eyes must have been blazing like hot coals. I am sure I bit my lips (I felt them damp and knew they were bleeding) to prevent myself from flinging out at the man in spite of my necessity. But I did my best to control my trembling mouth, and when he asked me how much I wanted on the miniature I answered, with a gulp in my throat:

"Two pounds ten, if you please, sir."

"Couldn't do it," said the pawnbroker.

I stood speechless for a moment, not knowing what to say next, and then the pawnbroker, with apparent indifference, said:

"I'll give you two ten for it out and out."

"You mean I am to *sell* . . ."

"Yus, take it or leave it, my dear."

It is no use saying what I suffered at that moment. I think I became ten years older during the few minutes I stood at that counter.

But they came to an end somehow, and the next thing I knew was that I was on my way back to Ilford; that the damp air had deepened into rain; that miserable and perhaps homeless beings, ill-clad and ill-fed, were creeping along in the searching cold with that shuffling sound which bad boots make on a wet pavement; and that I was telling myself with a fluttering heart that the sheltering wings of my beautiful mother in heaven had come to cover my child.

On reaching the Olivers', hot and breathless, I put three gold coins, two sovereigns and a half-sovereign, on to the table to pay off the broker's men.

They had been settling themselves for the night, and looked surprised and I thought chagrined, but took up the money and went away.

As they were going off one of them called me to the door, and in the little space at the foot of the stairs he said, tipping his fingers towards the cot:

''If that's your kiddie, miss, I recommend you to get it out o' this 'ere place quick—see?''

I stayed an hour or two longer because I was troubled about baby's cough; and before I left, being still uneasy, I did what I had never done before—wrote my address at the Jew's house, so that I could be sent for if I was ever wanted.

ONE HUNDREDTH CHAPTER

When I awoke next morning the last word of the broker's man seemed to be ringing in my ears.

I knew it was true; I knew I ought to remove baby from the house of the Olivers without another day's delay, but I was at a loss to know what to do with her.

To bring her to my own room at the Jew's was obviously impossible, and to advertise for a nurse for my child was to run the risk of falling into the toils of somebody who might do worse than neglect her.

In my great perplexity I recalled the waitress at the restaurant whose child had been moved to a Home in the country, and for some moments I thought how much better it would be that baby should be ''bonny and well'' instead of pale and thin as she was now. But when I reflected that if I took her to a public institution I should see her only once a month, I told myself that I could not and would not do so.

"I'll work my fingers to the bone first," I thought.

Yet life makes a fearful tug at a woman when it has once got hold of her, and, strangely enough, it was in the Jew's house that I first came to see that for the child's own sake I must part with her.

Somewhere about the time of my moving into the back room my employer made a kind of bower of branches and evergreens over the lead-flat roof of an outhouse in his back-yard—a Succah, as Miriam called it, built in honour of the Feast of Tabernacles, as a symbol of the time when the Israelites in the Wilderness dwelt in booths.

In this Succah the Jew's family ate all their meals during the seven or eight days of the Jewish feast, and one morning, as I sat at work by my open window, I heard Miriam after breakfast reading something from the Books of Moses.

It was the beautiful story of Jacob parting with Benjamin in the days of the famine, when there was corn in Egypt only—how the poor old father in his great love could not bring himself to give up his beloved son, although death threatened him; how Judah pleaded with Jacob to send the boy with him into the far country lest they should all die, "both we and thou and also our little ones;" and how at last Jacob said, "If it must be so, do this," but "if I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved."

It would be hard to say how deeply this story moved me while I listened from my room above. And now that I thought of it again, I saw that I was only sacrificing my child to my selfish love of her, and therefore the duty of a true mother was to put her into a Home.

It would not be for long. The work I was doing was not the only kind I was capable of. After I had liberated myself from the daily extortions of the Olivers I should be free to look about for more congenial and profitable employment; and then by and by baby and I might live together in that sweet cottage in the country (I always pictured it as a kind of Sunny Lodge, with roses looking in at the window of "Mary O'Neill's little room") which still shone through my dreams.

I spent some sleepless nights in reconciling myself to all this, and perhaps wept a little, too, at the thought that after years of separation I might be a stranger to my own darling. But at length I put my faith in "the call of the blood" to tell her she was mine, and then nothing remained except to select the institution to which my only love and treasure was to be assigned.

Accident helped me in this as in other things. One day on my westward journey a woman who sat beside me in the tram, and was constantly wiping her eyes (though I could see a sort of sunshine through her tears), could not help telling me, out of the overflowing of her poor heart, what had just been happening to her.

She was a widow, and had been leaving her little girl, three years old, at an orphanage, and though it had been hard to part with her, and the little darling had looked so pitiful when she came away, it would be the best for both of them in the long run.

I asked which orphanage it was, and she mentioned the name of it, telling me something about the founder—a good doctor who had been a father to the fatherless of thousands of poor women like herself.

That brought me to a quick decision, and the very next morning, putting on my hat and coat, I set off for the Home, which I knew where to find, having walked round it on my way back from the West End and heard the merry voices of happy children who were playing behind a high wall.

I hardly know whether to laugh or cry when I think of the mood in which I entered the orphanage. In spite of all that life had done to me, I really and truly felt as if I were about to confer an immense favour upon the doctor by allowing him to take care of my little woman.

Oh, how well I remember that little point of time!

My first disappointment was to learn that the good doctor was dead, and when I was shown into the office of his successor (everything bore such a businesslike air) I found an elderly man with a long "three-decker" neck and a glacial smile, who, pushing his spectacles up on to his forehead, said in a freezing voice:

"Well, ma'am, what is *your* pleasure?"

After a moment of giddiness I began to tell him my story—how I had a child and her nurse was not taking proper care of her; how I was in uncongenial employment myself, but hoped soon to get better; how I loved my little one and expected to be able to provide for her presently; and how, therefore, if he would receive her for a while, only a little while, on the understanding, the clear and definite understanding, that I could take her away as soon as I wished to . . .

Oh dear! Oh dear!

I do not know what there was in my appearance or speech which betrayed me, but I had got no further than this when the old gentleman said sharply:

"Can you provide a copy of the register of your child's birth to show that it is legitimate?"

What answer I made I cannot recollect, except that I told the truth in a voice with a tremor in it, for a memory of the registry office was rolling back on me and I could feel my blushes flushing into my face.

The result was instantaneous. The old gentleman touched a bell, drew his spectacles down on to his nose, and said in his icy tones:

"Don't take illegitimate children if we can help it."

It was several days before I recovered from the deep humiliation of this experience. Then (the exactions of the Olivers quickening my memory and at the same time deadening my pride) I remembered something which I had heard the old actress say during my time at the boarding-house about a hospital in Bloomsbury for unfortunate children—how the good man who founded it had been so firm in his determination that no poor mother in her sorrow should be put to further shame about her innocent child that he had hung out a basket at the gate at night in which she could lay her little one, if she liked, and then ring a bell and hide herself away.

It wasn't easy to reconcile oneself to such philanthropy, but after a sleepless night, and with rather a sickening pang of mingled hope and fear, I set off for this hospital.

It was a fine Sunday morning. The working-men in the East End were sitting at their doors smoking their pipes and reading their Sunday papers; but when I reached the West all the church bells were ringing, and people wearing black clothes and shiny black gloves were walking with measured steps through the wide courtyard that led to the chapel.

I will not say that I did not feel some qualms at entering a Protestant church, yet as soon as I had taken my seat and looked up at the gallery of the organ, where the children sat tier on tier, so quaint and sweet—the boys like robins in their bright red waistcoats, and the girls like rabbits in their mob-caps with fluted frills—and the service began, and the fresh young voices rose in hymns of praise to the good Father of us all, I thought of nothing except the joy of seeing Isabel there some day and hearing her singing in the choir.

When the service was over I asked for the secretary and was shown into his room.

I dare say he was a good man, but oh! why will so many good people wear such wintry weather in their faces that merely to look at them pierces a poor woman to the soul?

Apologising for the day, I told my story again (my head a little down), saying I understood that it was no barrier to a child in that orphanage that she had been born outside the pale of the law.

"On the contrary," said the secretary, "that is precisely the kind of child this house is intended for."

But when I went on to say that I assumed they still observed the wish of the founder that no questions of any kind should be asked about a child's birth or parentage, he said no, they had altered all that. Then he proceeded to explain that before a child could be received the mother must now go before a committee of gentlemen to satisfy them of her previous good character, and that the father of her baby had deserted both of them.

More than that, he told me that on being received the child was immediately re-registered and given a new name, in order that it might be cut off from the sin of its parents and the contamination of their shame.

It would be impossible for me to describe the feelings with which I listened to the secretary while he said all this, with the cast-metal face of a man who was utterly unconscious of the enormity of the crime he was describing.

"Before a committee of gentlemen?" I asked.

"That is so."

"Who are to ask her all those questions?"

"Yes."

"And then they are to change her baby's name?"

"Yes."

"Is she told what the new name is to be?"

"No, but she is given a piece of parchment containing a number which corresponds with the name in our books."

I rose to my feet, flushing up to the eyes I think, trembling from head to foot I know, and, forgetting who and what I was and why I was there—a poor, helpless, penniless being seeking shelter for her child—I burst out on the man in all the mad wrath of outraged motherhood.

"And you call this a Christian institution!" I said. "You take a poor woman in her hour of trouble and torture her with an inquisition into the most secret facts of her life, in public, and before a committee of men. And then you take her child, and so far as she is concerned you bury it, and give her a ticket to its grave. A hospital? This is no hospital. It is a cemetery. And yet you dare to write over your gates the words of our Lord—our holy and loving and blessed Lord—who said, 'Suffer little children . . .'"

But what is the use of repeating what I said then (perhaps unjustly) or afterwards in the silence of my own room and the helpless intoxication of my rage?

It was soon stamped out of me.

By the end of another week I was driven to such despair by the continued extortions of the Olivers that, seeing an advertisement in the Underground Railway of a Home for children in the country (asking for subscriptions and showing a group of happy little people playing under a chestnut-tree in bloom), I decided to make one more effort.

"They can't all be machines," I thought, "with the founders' hearts crushed out of them."

The day was Friday, when work was apt to heap up at the Jew's, and Mrs. Abramovitch had brought vests enough to my room to cover my bed, but nevertheless I put on my hat and coat and set out for the orphanage.

It was fifteen miles on the north side of London, so it cost me something to get there. But I was encouraged by the homelike appearance of the place when I reached it, and still more by finding that it was conducted by women, for at last, I thought, the woman-soul would speak to me.

But hardly had I told my story to the matron, repeating my request (very timidly this time and with such a humble, humble heart) that I might be allowed to recover my child as soon as I found myself able to provide for her, than she stopped me and said:

"My dear young person, we could have half the orphan children in London on your terms. Before we accept such a child as yours we expect the parent to give us a legal undertaking that she relinquishes all rights in it until it is sixteen years of age."

"Sixteen? Isn't that rather severe on a mother?" I said.

"Justly severe," said the matron. "Such women should be made to maintain their children, and thus realise that the way of transgressors is hard."

How I got back to London, whether by rail or tram or on foot, or what happened on the way (except that darkness was settling down on me, within and without), I do not know. I only know that very late that night, as late as eleven o'clock, I was turning out of Park Lane into Piccadilly, where the poor "public women" with their painted faces, dangling their little hand-bags from their wrists, were promenading in front of the gentlemen's clubs and smiling up at the windows.

These were the scenes which had formerly appalled me; but now I was suddenly surprised by a different feeling, and found myself thinking that among the women who sinned against their womanhood there might be some who sold themselves for bread to keep those they loved and who loved them.

This thought was passing through my mind when I heard a hollow ringing laugh from a woman who was standing at the foot of a flight of steps talking to a group of three gentlemen whose white shirt fronts beneath their overcoats showed that they were in evening dress.

Her laughter was not natural. It had no joy in it, yet she laughed and laughed, and feeling as if I *knew* (because life had that day trampled on me also), I said to myself:

"That woman's heart is dead."

This caused me to glance at her as I passed, when, catching a side glimpse of her face, I was startled by a memory I could not fix.

"Where and when have I seen that woman's face before?" I thought.

It seemed impossible that I could have seen it anywhere. But the woman's resemblance to somebody I had known, coupled with her joyless laughter, compelled me to stop at the next corner and look back.

By this time the gentlemen, who had been treating her lightly (O God, how men treat such women!), had left her and, coming arm-in-arm in my direction, with their silk hats tilted a little back, were saying:

"Poor old Aggie! She's off!" "Completely off!" "Is it drink, I wonder?"

And then, seeing me, they said:

"Gad, here's a nice little gal, though!" "No rouge, neither!" "By Jove, no! Her face is as white as a water-lily!"

Seeing that they were wheeling round, and fearing they were going to speak to me, I moved back and so came face to face with the woman, who was standing where they had left her, silent now, and looking after the men with fierce eyes under the fair hair that curled over her forehead.

Then in a moment a memory from the far past swept over me, and I cried, almost as if the name had been forced out of me:

"Sister Angela!"

The woman started, and it seemed for a moment as if she were going to run away. Then she laid hold of me by the arm and, looking searchingly into my face, said:

"Who are you? . . . I know. You are Mary O'Neill, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"I knew you were. I read about your marriage to that . . . that man. And now you are wondering why I am here. Well, come home with me and see."

It was not until afterwards that I knew by what mistake about my presence in that place Angela thought she must justify herself in my eyes (mine!); but taking me by the hand, just as she used to do when I was a child, she led, almost pulled, me down Piccadilly, and my will was so broken that I did not attempt to resist her.

We crossed Piccadilly Circus, with its white sheet of electric light, and, turning into the darker thoroughfares on the northern side of it, walked on until, in a narrow street of the Italian quarter of Soho, we stopped at a private door by the side of a café that had an Italian name on the window.

"This is where we live. Come in," said Angela, and I followed her through a long empty lobby and up three flights of bare stairs.

While we ascended, there was the deadened sound, as from the café, of men singing (in throbbing voices to mandolines and guitars) one of the Italian songs which I remembered to have heard from the piazza outside the convent on that night when Sister Angela left me in bed while she went off to visit the chaplain:

"Oh bella Napoli, Oh suol beato
Onde sorridere volle il creato."

"The Italian Club," said Angela. "Only one flight more. Come!"

ONE HUNDRED AND FIRST CHAPTER

At length Angela opened, with a key from her satchel, a door on the top landing, and we entered a darkened room which was partly in the roof.

As we stepped in I heard rapid breathing, which told me that we were in a sick chamber, and then a man's voice, very husky and weak, saying:

"Is that you, Agnes?"

"It's only me, dear," said Angela.

After a moment she turned up the solitary gas-jet, which had been burning low, and I saw the shadowy form of a man lying in a bed that stood in a corner. He was wasted with consumption, his long bony hands were lying on the counterpane, his dark hair was matted over his forehead as from sweat, but I could not mistake the large, lively grey eyes that looked out of his long thin face. It was Father Giovanni.

Angela went up to him and kissed him, and I could see that his eyes lighted with a smile as he saw her coming into the room.

"There's somebody with you, isn't there?" he said.

"Yes. Who do you think it is?"

"Who?"

"Don't you remember little Margaret Mary at the Sacred Heart?"

"Is this she?"

"Yes," said Angela, and then in a hoarse, angry voice the man said:

"What has she come here for?"

Angela told him that I had seen her on Piccadilly, and being a great lady now, I (Oh heaven!) was one of the people who came out into the streets at midnight to rescue lost ones.

"She looked as if she wondered what had brought me down to that life, so I've fetched her home to see."

I was shocked at Angela's mistake, but before I could gather strength or courage to correct her Giovanni was raising himself in bed and saying, with a defiant air, his eyes blazing like watch-fires:

"She does it for me, if you want to know. I've been eleven months ill—she does it all for me, I tell you."

And then, in one of those outbursts of animation which come to the victims of that fell disease, he gave me a rapid account of what had happened to them since they ran away from Rome—how at first he had earned their living as a teacher of languages; how it became known that he was an unfrocked and excommunicated priest who had broken his vows, and then his pupils had left him; how they had struggled on for some years longer, though pursued by this character as by a malignant curse; and how at length his health had quite broken down, and he would have starved but for Agnes (Angela being her nun's name), who had stuck to him through everything.

While the sick man said this in his husky voice, Angela was sitting on the bed by his side with her arm about his waist, listening to him with a sort of pride and looking at me with a kind of triumph.

"I dare say you wonder why I didn't try to get work," she said. "I *could* have got it if I had wanted to. I could have got it at the Italian laundry. But what was two shillings a day to a man who was ordered new milk and fresh eggs five times every twenty-four hours, not to speak of the house rent?"

"She ought to have let me die first," said Giovanni, and then, looking at me again with his large, glittering, fierce eyes, he said:

"*You* think she ought to have let me die, don't you?"

"No, no, no," I said—it was all I *could* say, for their mistake about myself was choking me.

Perhaps my emotion appeased both of them, for after a moment Angela beat out Giovanni's pillow and straightened his counterpane, and then told him to lie down and be quiet, while she brought a chair for me and took off her things in her own bedroom.

But hardly had she gone into an adjoining chamber when the sick man raised himself again and, reaching over in my direction, told me in a hoarse whisper the story of the first night of her present way of life—how the doctor had said he must be removed to the hospital; how Agnes would not part with him; how the landlord had threatened to turn them out; and how at last, after sitting with her head in her hands the whole evening, Aggie had got up and gone out and, coming back at midnight, had thrown two sovereigns on the table and said, "There you are, Giovanni—that's our rent and your eggs and milk for one week, anyway."

By this time Angela had returned to the room (her paint and rouge washed off, and her gay clothes replaced by a simple woollen jacket over a plain underskirt), and she began to beat up an egg, to boil some milk, to pour out a dose of medicine, and to do, with all a good woman's tact, a good woman's tenderness, the little services of which an invalid stands in need.

Oh heavens, how beautiful it was—fearfully, awfully tragically beautiful!

I was deeply moved as I sat in silence watching her; and when at length Giovanni, who had been holding her hand in his own long, bony ones and sometimes putting it to his lips, dropped off to sleep (tired out, perhaps, by talking to me), and she, drawing up to where I sat by the end of the bed, resumed her self-defence, saying in a whisper that ladies like me could not possibly understand what a woman would do, in spite of herself, when the life of one she loved was threatened, I could bear her mistake no longer, but told her of my real condition—that I was no longer a lady, that I had run away from my husband, that I had a child, and was living as a poor seamstress in the East End of London.

Angela listened to my story in astonishment; and when I had come to an end she was holding my hand and looking into my eyes with just that look which she had when she put me to bed for the first time at school, and, making her voice very low, told me to be a good child of the Infant Jesus.

"It's nearly one o'clock. You can't go back to the East End to-night," she whispered.

"Oh, I must, I must," I said, getting up and making for the door. But before I had reached it my limbs gave way, whether from the strain of emotion or physical weakness, and if it had not been for Angela I should have dropped to the floor.

After that she would hear of no excuses. I must stay until morning. I could sleep in her own bed in the other room, and she could lay a mattress for herself on the floor by the side of Giovanni's. There would be no great sacrifice in that. It was going to be one of Giovanni's bad nights, and she was likely to be up and down all the time anyway.

Half an hour later I was in bed in a little room that was separated by a thin papered partition from the room of the poor consumptive, and Angela, who had brought me a cup of hot milk, was saying in a whisper:

"He's very bad. The doctor says he can't last longer than a week. Sister Veronica (you remember her, she's Mildred Bankes that used to be) tried to get him into a home for the dying. It was all arranged, too, but at the last moment he wouldn't go. He told them that, if they wanted to separate him from Agnes, they had better bring his coffin because he would be dead before they got him to the door."

When she had gone I lay a long time in the dark, listening to the sounds on the other side of the partition.

Giovanni awoke with an alarming fit of coughing, and in the querulous, plaintive, fretful, sometimes angry tones which invalids have, he grumbled at Angela and then cried over her, saying what a burden he was to her, while she, moving about the room in her bare feet, coaxed and caressed him, and persuaded him to take his milk or his medicine.

Through all this I would hear at intervals the drumming noises of the singing downstairs, which sounded in my ears (as the singers were becoming more and more intoxicated) like the swirling and screeching of an ironical requiem for the dying man before he was dead:

"Oh bella Napoli, Oh suol beato
Onde sorridere volle il creato."

But somewhere in those dead hours in which London sleeps everything became still, and my mind, which had been questioning the grim darkness on the worst of the world's tragedies (what a woman will do for those she loves), fell back on myself and I thought of the Christian institutions which had turned me from their doors, and then of this "street-walker" who had given up her own bed to me and was now lying in the next room on a mattress on the floor.

I could not help it if I felt a startling reverence for Angela, as a ministering angel faithful unto death, and I remembered that as I fell asleep I was telling myself that we all needed God's mercy, God's pardon, and that God would forgive her because she had loved much.

But sleep was more tolerant still. I dreamt that Angela died, and on reaching the gates of heaven all the saints of God met her, and after they had clothed her in a spotless white robe, one of them—it was the blessed Mary Magdalene—took her hand and said:

"Here is another of the holy martyrs."

I awoke from that dream with beads of perspiration on my forehead. But I dare not say what confused and terrible thoughts came next, except that they were about baby—what I might do myself if driven to the last extremity. When I slept and dreamt again, it was I who was dead, and it was my darling mother who met me and took me to the feet of the Blessed Virgin and said:

"Mother of all Mothers, who knows all that is in a mother's heart, this is my little daughter. She did not intend to do wrong. It was all for the sake of her child."

When I awoke in the morning, with the darkness shivering off through the gloom, this last dream was sitting upon me like a nightmare. It terrified me. I felt as if I were standing on the edge of a precipice and some awful forces were trying to push me over it.

The London sparrows were chirping on the skylight over my head, and I could faintly hear the Italian criers in the front street:

"Latte!" "Spazzina!" "Erbaggi freschi!"

In spite of myself (hating myself for it after all the tenderness that had been shown me), I could not overcome a feeling of shame at finding myself lying where I was, and I got up to run away that I might cleanse my soul of the evil thoughts which had come to me while there.

As I dressed I listened for a sound from the adjoining room. All was quiet now. The poor restless ones were at last getting a little rest.

A few minutes afterwards I passed on tiptoe through their room without looking towards the bed, and reaching the door to the staircase I opened it as noiselessly as I could.

Then I closed it softly after me, on so much suffering and so much love.

ONE HUNDRED AND SECOND CHAPTER

THE sun was shining in the street. It was one of those clear, clean, frosty mornings when the very air of London, even in the worst places, seems to be washed by the sunlight from the sin and drink of the night before.

I was on my way to that church among the mews of Mayfair to which I had gone so frequently during the early days of my marriage when I was struggling against the mortal sin (as I thought it was) of loving Martin.

Just as I reached the church and was ascending the steps, a gorgeous landau with high-stepping horses and a powdered footman drew up at the bottom of them.

The carriage, which bore a coronet on the door, contained a lady in long furs, a rosy-faced baby-girl in squirrel skins with a large doll in her arms, and a nurse.

I could see that, like myself, the lady (a young mother) had come to confess, for as she rose from her seat she told the child to sit quiet and be good and she would not keep her long.

"Tum out soon, mummy, and dolly will lub you eber and eber," said the child.

The lady stooped and kissed the little one, and then, with a proud and happy look, stepped out of the carriage and passed into the church, while the door-keeper opened the vestibule door for her and bowed deeply.

I stood at the top of the steps for a moment looking back at the carriage, the horses, the footman, the nurse, and, above all, the baby-girl with her doll, and then followed the lady into the church.

Apparently mass was just over. Little spirelets of smoke were rising from the candles on the altar which the sacristan was putting out, a few communicants were still on their knees, and others with light yet echoing footsteps were making for the door.

The lady in furs had already taken her place at one of the confessional boxes, and as there seemed to be no other that was occupied by a priest, I knelt on a chair in the nave and tried to fix my mind on the prayers (once so familiar) for the examination of conscience before confession:

"Oh, Lord Jesus Christ, dispel the darkness of my heart, that I may bewail my sins and rightly confess them."

But the labouring of my spirit was like the flight of a bat in the daylight. Though I tried hard to keep my mind from wandering, I could not do so. Again and again it went back to the lady in furs with the coroneted carriage and the high-stepping horses.

She was about my own age, and she began to rise before my tightly closed eyes as a vision of what I might have been myself if I had not given up everything for love—wealth, rank, title, luxury.

God is my witness that down to that moment I had never once thought I had made any sacrifice, but now, as by a flash of cruel lightning, I saw myself as I was—a peeress who had run away from her natural condition and was living in the slums, working like any other work-girl.

Even this did not hurt me much, but when I thought of the rosy-faced child in the carriage, and then of my own darling at Mrs. Oliver's as I had seen her last, so thin and pale, and with her little bib stained by her curdled milk, a feeling I had never had before pierced to my very soul.

I asked myself if this was what God looked down upon and permitted—that because I had obeyed what I still believed to be the purest impulse of my nature, love, my child must be made to suffer.

Then something hard began to form in my heart. I told myself that what I had been taught to believe about God was falsehood and deception.

All this time I was trying to hush down my mind by saying my prayer, which called on the gracious Virgin Mary to intercede for me with my Redeemer, and the holy Saints of God to assist me.

"Assist me by thy grace, that I may be able to declare my sins to the priest, thy Vicar."

It was of no use. Every moment my heart was hardening, and what I had intended to confess about my wicked thoughts of the night before was vanishing away. At last I rose to my feet and, lifting my head, looked boldly up at the altar.

Just at that moment the young peeress, having finished her confession, went off with a light step and a cheerful face. Her kneeling-place at the confessional box was now vacant, yet I did not attempt to take it, and some minutes passed in which I stood biting my lips to prevent a cry. Then the priest parted his curtains and beckoned to me, and I moved across and stood stubbornly by the perforated brass grating.

"Father," I said, as firmly as I could, for my throat was fluttering, "I came here to make my confession, but something has come over me since I entered this church, and now I cannot."

"What has come over you, my child?" asked the priest.

"I feel that what is said about God in a place like this, that He is a kind and beneficent Father, who is just and merciful and pities the sufferings of His children, is untrue. It is all wrong and false. *God does not care.*"

The priest did not answer me immediately, but after a moment of silence he said in a quivering voice:

"My child, I feel just like that myself sometimes. It is the devil tempting you. He is standing by your side and whispering in your ear, at this moment."

I shuddered, and the priest added:

"I see how it is, my daughter. You are suffering, and those you love are suffering too. But must you surrender your faith on that account? Look round at the pictures on these walls [the Stations of the Cross]. Think of the Great Sufferer, the Great Martyr, who in the hour of His death, at the malicious power of the world, cried, '*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani:* My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?' "

I had dropped to my knees by now, my head was down, and my hands were clasped together.

"You are wrong, my child, if you think God does not care for you because He allows you to suffer. Are you rich? Are you prosperous? Have you every earthly blessing? Then beware, for Satan is watching for your soul. But are you poor? Are you going through unmerited trouble? Have you lost some one who was dearer to you than your heart of hearts? Then take courage, for our holy and blessed Saviour has marked you for His own."

I know nothing of that priest except his whispering voice, which, coming through the grating of the confessional, produced the effect of the supernatural, but I thought then, and I think now, that he must have been a great as well as a good man.

I perfectly recollect that, when I left the church and passed into the streets, it seemed as if his spirit went with me and built up in my soul a resolution that was bright with heavenly tears and sunshine.

Work! Work! Work! I should work still harder than before. No matter how mean, ill-paid, and uncongenial my work might be, I should work all day and all night if necessary. And since I had failed to get my child into an orphanage, it was clearly intended that I should keep her with me, for my own charge and care and joy.

This was the mood in which I returned to the house of the Jew.

It was Saturday morning, and though the broader thoroughfares of the East End were crowded and the narrower streets full of life, the Jew's house was silent, for it was the Jewish Sabbath.

As I went hurriedly upstairs I heard the Jew himself, who was dressing for the synagogue, singing his Sabbath hymn: *Lerho daudee likras kollo*—"Come, O friend, let us go forth to meet the Bride, let us receive the Sabbath with joy!"

Then came a shock.

When I reached my room I found, to my dismay, that the pile of vests which I had left on my bed on going out the day before had been removed; and just as I was telling myself that no one else except Mrs. Abramovitch had a key to my door I heard shuffling footsteps on the stair, and knew that her husband was coming up to me.

A moment afterwards the Jew stood in my doorway. He was dressed in his Sabbath suit and, free from the incongruous indications of his homely calling, the patriarchal appearance which had first struck me was even more marked than before. His face was pale, his expression was severe, and if his tongue betrayed the broken English of the Polish Jew, I, in my confusion and fear, did not notice it then.

My first thought was that he had come to reprove me for neglecting my work, and I was prepared to promise to make up for my absence. But at a second glance I saw that something had happened, something had become known, and that he was there to condemn and denounce me.

"You have been out all night," he said. "Can you tell me where you have been?"

I knew I could not, and though it flashed upon me to say that I had slept at the house of a friend, I saw that, if he asked who my friend was, and what, I should be speechless.

The Jew waited for my reply and then said:

"You have given us a name—can you say it is your true and right one?"

Again I made no answer, and after another moment the Jew said:

"Can you deny that you have a child whom you have hidden from our knowledge?"

I felt myself gasping, but still I did not speak.

"Can you say that it was lawfully born according to your Christian marriage?"

I felt the colour flushing into my face but I was still silent; and after a moment in which, as I could see, the stern-natured Jew was summing me up as a woman of double life and evil character, he said:

" Then it is true? . . . Very well, you will understand that from this day you cease to be in my service."

All this time my eyes were down, but I was aware that somebody else had come into the room. It was Miriam, and she was trying to plead for me.

"Father . . ." she began, but, turning hotly upon her, the Jew cried passionately:

"Go away! A true daughter of Israel should know better than to speak for such a woman."

I heard the girl going slowly down the stairs, and then the Jew, stepping up to me and speaking more loudly than before, said:

"Woman, leave my house at once, before you corrupt the conscience of my child."

Again I became aware that some one had come into the room. It was Mrs. Abramovitch, and she, too, was pleading for me.

"Israel! Calm thyself! Do not give way to injustice and anger. On Shobbos morning, too!"

"Hannah," said the Jew, "thou speakest with thy mouth, not thy heart. The Christian doth not deny that she hath given thee a false name, and is the adulterous mother of a misbegotten child. If she were a Jewish woman she would be summoned before the Beth Din, and in better days our law of Moses would have stoned her. Shall she, because she is a Christian, dishonour a good Jewish house? No! The hand of the Lord would go out against me."

"But she is homeless, and she hath been a good servant to thee, Israel. Give her time to find another shelter."

There was a moment of silence after that, and then the Jew said:

"Very well! It shall not be said that Israel Abramovitch knows not to temper justice with mercy."

And then, my face being still down, I heard him saying over my head:

"You may stay here another week. After that I wash my hands of thee."

With these hard words he turned away, and I heard him going heavily down the stairs. His wife stayed a little longer, saying something in a kind voice, which I did not comprehend, and then she followed him.

I do not think I had spoken a word. I continued to stand where the Jew had left me. After a while I heard him closing and locking the door of his own apartment, and knew that he was going off to his synagogue in Brick Lane in his tall silk hat worn on the back of his head like a skull-cap, and with his wife and daughter behind him, carrying his leather-bound prayer-book.

I hardly knew what else was happening. My heart was heaving like a dead body on a billow. All that the priest had said was gone. In its place there was a paralysing despair as if the wheels of life were rolling over me.

MEMORANDUM BY MARTIN CONRAD

My dear, long-suffering, martyred darling!

It makes my blood boil to see how the very powers of darkness, in the name of religion, morality, philanthropy and the judgment of God, were persecuting my poor little woman.

But why speak of myself at all, or interrupt my darling's narrative, except to say what was happening in my efforts to reach her?

While we were swinging along in our big liner over the heaving bosom of the Mediterranean the indefinable sense of her danger never left me day or night.

That old dream of the glacier and the precipice continued to haunt my sleep, with the difference that, instead of the aurora glistening in my dear one's eyes, there was now a blizzard behind her.

The miserable thing so tortured me as we approached Malta (where I expected to receive a reply to the cable I had sent from Port Said to the house of Daniel O'Neill) that I felt physically weak at the thought of the joy or sorrow ahead of me.

Though there was no telegram from my darling at Malta, there was one from the chairman of my committee, saying he was coming to Marseilles to meet our steamer and would sail the rest of the way home with us.

Indirectly this brought me a certain comfort. It reminded me of the letter I had written for my dear one on the day I left Castle Raa. Sixteen months had passed since then, serious things had happened in the interval, and I had never thought of that letter before.

It was not to her father, as she supposed, and certainly not to her husband. It was to my chairman, asking him, in the event of my darling sending it on, to do whatever was necessary to protect her during my absence.

If my chairman had not received that letter, my conclusion would be that my dear little woman had never been reduced to such straits as to require help from any one. If he had in fact received it, he must have done what I wished, and therefore everything would be well.

There was a certain suspense as well as a certain consolation in all this, and before our big ship slowed down at Marseilles I was on deck searching for my chairman among the people waiting for us on the pier.

I saw him immediately, waving his travelling cap with a flourish of joy, and I snatched a little comfort from that.

As soon as the steamer was brought to he was the first to come aboard, and I scanned his face as he hurried up the gangway. It was beaming.

"It's all right," I thought; "a man could not look as happy as that if he were bringing me bad news."

A moment afterwards he was shaking my hand, clapping me on the shoulder, and saying:

"Splendid! Magnificent! Glorious achievement! Proved your point up to the hilt, my boy!"

And when I said something about not having gone all the way he cried:

"Never mind! You'll do it next time," which made some of my shipmates who were standing round with shining eyes say, "Aye, aye, sir," and then one of them (it was good old O'Sullivan) shouted:

"By the stars of heaven, that's thrue, my lord! And if anybody's after saying that the Commanther was turned back this time by anything less than the almighty power of Nature in her wrath, you may say there's forty-eight of us here to tell him he lies."

"I believe it," said the chairman, and then there were further congratulations, with messages from members of my committee, but never a word from my dear one.

Thinking the chairman might hesitate to speak of a private matter until we were alone, I took him down to my stateroom. But he had nothing to say there, either, except about articles to be written, reports to be compiled, and invitations to be accepted.

Several hours passed like this. We were again out at sea, and my longing to know what had happened was consuming me, but I dared not ask from fear of a bad answer.

Before the night was out, however, I had gone to work in a roundabout way. Taking O'Sullivan into my confidence, I told him it had not been my parents that I had been anxious about (God forgive me!), but somebody else whom he had seen and spoken to.

"Do you mean Mal . . . I should say Lady . . ."

"Yes."

"By the holy saints, the way I was thinking that when I brought you the letter at Port Said, and saw the clouds of heaven still hanging on you."

I found that the good fellow had a similar trouble of his own (not yet having heard from his mother), so he fell readily into my plan, which was that of cross-questioning the chairman about my dear one, and I about his, and then meeting secretly and imparting what we had learned.

Anybody may laugh who likes at the thought of two big lumbering fellows afraid to face the truth (scouting round and round it), but it grips me by the throat to this day to see myself taking our chairman into a quiet corner of the smoke-room and saying:

"Poor old O'Sullivan! He hasn't heard from his old mother yet. She was sick when he sailed, and wouldn't have parted with him to go with anybody except myself. You haven't heard of her, have you?"

And then to think of O'Sullivan doing the same for me, with:

"The poor Commanther! Look at him there. Faith, he's keeping a good heart, isn't he? But it's just destroyed he is for want of news of a great friend that was in trouble. It was a girl . . . a lady, I mane. You haven't heard the whisper of a word, sir . . . eh?"

Our chairman had heard nothing. And when (bracing myself at last) I asked point-blank if anything had been sent to him as from me, and he answered "No," I might have been relieved, but I wasn't. Though I did not know then that my darling had burnt my letter, I began to feel that she was the last person in the world to use it, being (God bless her!) of the mettle that makes a woman want to fight her own battles without asking help of any one.

This quite crushed down my heart, for, seeing that she had sent no reply to my cables, I could not find any escape from the conclusion that she was where no word could come from her—she was dead!

Lord God, how I suffered when this phantom got into my mind! I used to walk up and down the promenade deck late into the night, trying and condemning myself as if I had been my own judge and jury.

"She is dead. I have killed her," I thought.

Thank God, the phantom was soon laid by the gladdest sight I ever saw on earth or ever expect to see, and it wouldn't be necessary to speak of it now but for the glorious confidence it brought me.

It was the same with me as with a ship-broken man whom Providence comes to relieve in his last extremity, and I could fix the place of mine as certainly as if I had marked it on a chart. We had called at Gibraltar (where O'Sullivan had received a letter from his mother, saying she was splendid) and were running along the coast of Portugal.

It was a dirty black night, with intervals of rain, I remember. While my shipmates were making cheerful times of it in the smoke-room (O'Sullivan with heart at ease singing the "Minsthrel Boy" to a chorus of noisy cheers) I was walking up and down the deck with my little stock of courage nearly gone, for turn which way I would it was dark, dark, dark, when just as we picked up the lights of Finisterre something said to me, as plainly as words could speak:

"What in the name of thunder are you thinking about? Do you mean to say that you were turned back in the 88th latitude, and have been hurried home without the loss of a moment, only to find everything over at the end of your journey? No, no, no! Your poor, dear, heroic little woman is alive! She may be in danger, and beset by all the powers of the devil, but that's just why you have been brought home to save her, and you *will* save her, as surely as the sun will rise to-morrow morning."

There are thoughts which, like great notes in music, grip you by the soul and lift you into a world which you don't naturally belong to. This was one of them.

Never after that did I feel one moment's real anxiety. I was my own man once more; and though I continued to walk the deck while our good ship sped along in the night, it was only because there was a kind of wild harmony between the mighty voice of the rolling billows of the Bay and the unheard anthem of boundless hope that was singing in my breast.

I recollect that during my walk a hymn was always haunting me. It was the same that we used to sing in the shuddering darkness of that perpetual night, when we stood (fifty downhearted men) under the shelter of our snow camp, with a ninety mile blizzard shrieking above us:

> *"Lead, kindly Light, amid th' encircling gloom,*
> *Lead Thou me on."*

But the light was within me now, and I knew as certainly as that the good ship was under my feet that I was being carried home at the call of the Spirit to rescue my stricken darling.

God keep her on her solitary way! England! England! England! Less than a week and I should be there!

That was early hours on Saturday morning—the very Saturday when my poor little woman, after she had been turned away by those prating philanthropists, was being sheltered by the prostitute.

Let him explain it who can. I cannot. M. C.

[End of Martin Conrad's Memorandum]

ONE HUNDRED AND THIRD CHAPTER

I must have been sitting a full hour or more on the end of my bed—stunned, stupefied, unable to think—when Miriam, back from the synagogue, came stealthily upstairs to say that a messenger had come for me about six o'clock the night before.

"He said his name was Oliver, and father saw him, and that's how he came to know. 'Tell her that her child is ill, and she is to come immediately,' he said."

I was hardly conscious of what happened next—hardly aware of passing through the streets to Ilford. I had a sense of houses flying by as they seem to do from an express train; of my knees trembling; of my throat tightening; and of my whole soul crying out to God to save the life of my child until I could get to her.

When I reached the house of the Olivers the worst of my fears were relieved. Mrs. Oliver was sitting before the fire with baby on her lap.

At sight of me the woman began to mumble out something about my delay, and how she could not be held responsible if anything happened; but caring nothing about responsibility, hers or mine, I took baby from her without more words.

My child was in a state of deep drowsiness, and when I tried to rouse her I could not do so. I gathered that this condition had lasted twenty-four hours, during which she had taken no nourishment, with the result that she was now very thin.

I knew nothing of children's ailments but a motherly instinct must have come to my aid, for I called for a bath, and bathed baby, and she awoke, and then took a little food.

But again she dropped back into the drowsy condition, and Mrs. Oliver, who was alarmed, called in some of the neighbours to look at her.

Apparently the mission of the good women was to comfort Mrs. Oliver, not me, but they said, "Sleep never did no harm to nobody," and I found a certain consolation in that.

Hours passed. I was barely sensible of anything that happened beyond the narrow circle of my own lap, but at one moment I heard the squirling of a brass band that was going up the street, with the shuffling of an irregular procession.

"It's the strike," said Mrs. Oliver, running to the window. "There's Ted, carrying a banner."

A little later I heard the confused noises of a strike meeting, which was being held on the Green. It was like the croaking of a frog-pond, with now and then a strident voice (the bricklayer's) crying "Buckle your belts tighter, and starve rather than give in, boys." Still later I heard the procession going away, singing with a slashing sound that was like driving wind and pelting rain:

"The land, the land, the blessed, blessed land,
Gawd gave the land to the people."

But nothing awakened baby, and towards three in the afternoon (the idea that she was really ill having taken complete possession of me) I asked where I could find the nearest doctor, and being told, I went off in search of him.

The doctor was on his rounds, so I left a written message indicating baby's symptoms and begging him to come to her immediately.

On the way back I passed a number of children's funerals—easily recognisable by the combined coach and hearse, the white linen "weepers" worn by the coachman and his assistant, and the little coffin, sprinkled with cheap flowers, in the glass case behind the driver's seat. These sights, which brought back a memory of the woman who carried my baby down the Mile End Road, almost deprived me of my senses.

I had hardly got back and taken off my coat and warmed my hands and dress by the fire before taking baby in my lap, when the doctor, in his gig, pulled up at the door.

He was a young man, but he seemed to take in the situation in a moment. I was the mother, wasn't I? Yes. And this woman was baby's nurse? Yes.

Then he drew up a chair and looked steadfastly down at baby, and I went through that breathless moment, which most of us know, when we are waiting for the doctor's first word.

"Some acute digestive trouble here apparently," he said, and then something about finding out the cause of it.

But hardly had he put his hands on my child as she lay in my lap than there came a faintly discoloured vomit.

"What have you been giving her?" he said, looking round at Mrs. Oliver.

Mrs. Oliver protested that she had given baby nothing except her milk, but the doctor said sharply:

"Don't talk nonsense, woman. Show me what you've given her."

Then Mrs. Oliver, looking frightened, went upstairs and brought down a bottle of medicine, saying it was a soothing syrup which I had myself bought for baby's cough.

"As I thought!" said the doctor, and going to the door and opening it, he flung the bottle on to the waste ground opposite, saying as he did so:

"If I hear of you giving your babies any more of your soothing syrup I'll see what the Inspector has to say."

After that, ignoring nurse, he asked me some searching and intimate questions—if I had had a great grief or shock or worry while baby was coming, and whether and how long I had nursed her.

I answered as truthfully as I could, though I saw the drift of his inquiries, and was trembling with fear of what he would tell me next.

He said nothing then, however, except to make his recommendations. And remembering my loss of work, my heart sank as he enumerated baby's needs—fresh cow's milk diluted with lime water, small quantities of meat juice, and twenty to thirty drops of the best brandy three or four times a day.

When he rose to go I paid his fee. It was only half-a-crown, but he cannot have known how much that meant to me, for as he was leaving the kitchen he told me to send for him again in the morning if there were a change in the symptoms.

Feeling that I did not yet know the whole truth (though I was trembling in terror of it), I handed baby to Mrs. Oliver and followed the doctor to the door.

"Doctor," I said, "is my baby very ill?"

He hesitated for a moment and then answered, "Yes."

"Dangerously ill?"

Again he hesitated, and then looking closely at me (I felt my lower lip trembling) he said:

"I won't say that. She's suffering from marasmus, provoked by overdoses of the pernicious stuff that is given by ignorant and unscrupulous people to a restless child to keep it quiet. But her real trouble comes of maternal weakness, and the only cure for that is good nourishment and above all fresh air and sunshine."

"Will she get better?"

"If you can take her away into the country she will, certainly."

"And if . . . if I can't," I asked, the words fluttering up to my lips, "will she . . . *die?*"

The doctor looked steadfastly at me again (I was biting my lip to keep it firm), and said:

"She *may.*"

When I returned to the kitchen I knew that I was face to face with another of the great mysteries of a woman's life—Death—the death of my child, which my very love and tenderness had exposed her to.

Meantime Mrs. Oliver, who was as white as a whitewashed wall, was excusing herself in a whining voice that had the sound of a spent wave. She wouldn't have hurt the pore dear precious for worlds, and if it hadn't been for Ted, who was so tired at night and wanted sleep after walking in percession . . .

Partly to get rid of the woman I sent her out (with almost the last of my money) for some of the things ordered by the doctor. While she was away, and I was looking down at the little silent face on my lap, praying for one more glimpse of my Martin's sea-blue eyes, the bricklayer came lunging into the house.

"Where's Lizer?" he said.

I told him and he cried:

"The baiby again! Allus the baiby!"

With that he took out of his pocket a cake of moist tobacco, cut and rolled some of it in his palm, and then charged his pipe and lit it—filling the air with clouds of rank smoke, which made baby bark and cough without rousing her.

I pointed this out to him and asked him not to smoke.

"Eh?" he said, and then I told him that the doctor had been called and what he had said about fresh air.

"So that's it, is it?" he said. "Good! Just reminds me of something I want to say, so I'll introdooce the matter now, in a manner o' speaking. Last night I 'ad to go to Mile End for you, and here's Lizer out on a sim'lar arrand. If people 'ave got to be 'ospital nurses to a sick baiby they ought to be paid, mind ye. We're only pore, and it may be a sacred dooty walkin' in percession, but it ain't fillin'."

Choking with anger, I said:

"Put out your pipe, please."

"Ma'am to *you!*"

"Put it out this moment, sir, or I'll see if I can't find somebody to make you."

The bricklayer laughed, then pointed with the shank of his pipe to the two photographs over the mantelpiece, and said:

"See them? Them's me, with my dooks up. If any friend o' yourn as is interested in the baiby comes to lay a 'and on me I'll see if I've forgot 'ow to use 'em."

I felt the colour shuddering out of my cheeks, and putting baby into the cot I turned on the man and cried:

"You scoundrel! The doctor has told me what is the immediate cause of my baby's illness and your wife has confessed to giving overdoses of a drug at your direction. If you don't leave this house in one minute I'll go straight to the police-station and charge you with poisoning my child."

The bully in the coward was cowed in a moment.

"Don't get 'uffy, ma'am," he said. "I'm the peaceablest man in the East End, and if I mentioned anything about a friend o' yourn it slipped out in the 'eat of the moment—see?"

"Out you go! Go! Go!" I cried, and, incredible as it may seem, the man went flying before my face as if I had been a fury.

It would be a long tale to tell of what happened the day following, the next and the next and the next—how baby became less drowsy, but more restless; how being unable to retain her food she grew thinner and thinner; how I wished to send for the doctor, but dared not do so from fear of his fee; how the little money I had left was barely sufficient to buy the food and stimulants which were necessary to baby's cure: how I sat for long hours with my little lamb on my lap straining my dry eyes into her face; and how I cried to God for the life of my child, which was everything I had or wanted.

All this time I was still lodging at the Jew's, returning to it late every night, and leaving it early in the morning, but nothing happened there that seemed to me of the smallest consequence. One day Miriam, looking at me with her big black eyes, said:

"You must take more rest, dear, or you will make yourself ill."

"No, no, I am not ill," I answered, and then remembering how necessary my life was to the life of my child, I said, "I must not be ill."

At last on the Saturday morning—I know now it must have been Saturday, but time did not count with me then—I overheard Mrs. Abramovitch pleading for me with her husband, saying they knew I was in trouble and therefore I ought to have more time to find lodgings, another week—three days at all events. But the stern-natured man with his rigid religion was inexorable. It was God's will that I should be punished, and who was he to step in between the All-High and His just retribution?

"The woman is displeasing to God," he said, and then he declared that, the day being Sabbath (the two tall candlesticks and the Sabbath loaves must have been under his eyes at the moment), he would give me until nine o'clock that night, and if I had not moved out by that time he would put my belongings into the street.

I remember that the Jew's threat made no impression upon my mind. It mattered very little to me where I was to lodge next week or what roof was to cover me.

When I reached the Olivers' that morning I found baby distinctly worse. Even the brandy would not stay on her stomach and hence her strength was plainly diminishing. I sat for some time looking steadfastly into my child's face, and then I asked myself, as millions of mothers must have done before me, why my baby should suffer so. Why? Why? Why?

There seemed to be no answer to that question except one. Baby was suffering because I was poor. If I had not been poor I could have taken her into the country for fresh air and sunshine, where she would have recovered as the doctor had so confidently assured me.

And why was I poor? I was poor because I had refused to be enslaved by my father's authority when it was vain and wrong, or my husband's when it was gross and cruel, and because I had obeyed the highest that was in me—the call of love.

And now God looked down on the sufferings of my baby, who was being killed for my conduct—killed by my poverty!

I tremble to say what wild impulses came at that thought. I felt that if my baby died and I ever stood before God to be judged I should judge Him in return. I should ask Him why, if He were Almighty, He permitted the evil in the world to triumph over the good, and if He were our heavenly Father why He allowed innocent children to suffer? Was there any *human* father who could be so callous, so neglectful, so cruel, as that?

I dare say it was a terrible thing to bring God to the bar of judgment, to be judged by His poor weak ignorant creature; but it was also terrible to sit with a dying baby on my lap (I thought mine was dying), and to feel that there was nothing—not one thing—I could do to relieve its sufferings.

My faith went down like a flood during the heavy hours of that day—all that I had been taught to believe about God's goodness and the marvellous efficacy of the Sacraments of His Church.

I thought of the Sacrament of my marriage, which the Pope told me had been sanctioned by my Redeemer under a natural law that those who entered into it might live together in peace and love—and then of my husband and his brutal infidelities.

I thought of the Sacrament of my baby's baptism, which was to exorcise all the devils out of my child—and then of the worst devil in the world, poverty, which was taking her very life.

After that a dark shadow crossed my soul, and I told myself that since God was doing nothing, since He was allowing my only treasure to be torn away from me, I would fight for my child's life as any animal fights for her young.

By this time a new kind of despair had taken hold of me. It was no longer the paralysing despair but the despair that has a driving force in it.

"My child shall not die," I thought. "At least poverty shall not kill her!"

Many times during the day I had heard Mrs. Oliver trying to comfort me with various forms of sloppy sentiment. Children were a great trial, they were allus makin' and keepin' people pore, and it was sometimes better for the dears themselves to be in their 'eavenly Father's boosim.

I hardly listened. It was the same as if somebody were talking to me in my sleep. But towards nightfall my deaf ear caught something about myself—that "it" (I knew what that meant) might be better for me, also, for then I should be free of encumbrances and could marry again.

"Of course you could—you so young and good-lookin'. Only the other day the person at number five could tell me as you were the prettiest woman as comes up the Row, and the Vicar's wife couldn't hold a candle to you. 'Fine feathers makes fine birds,' says she: 'Give your young lady a nice frock and a bit o' colour in her cheeks, and there ain't many as could best her in the West End neither.' "

As the woman talked dark thoughts took possession of me. I began to think of Angela. I tried not to, but I could not help it.

And then came the moment of my fiercest trial. With a sense of Death hanging over my child I told myself that the only way to drive it off was to make *some great sacrifice.*

Hitherto I had thought of everything I possessed as belonging to baby, but now I felt that *I myself* belonged to her. I had brought her into the world, and it was my duty to see that she did not suffer.

All this time the inherited instinct of my religion was fighting hard with me, and I was saying many Hail Marys to prevent myself from doing what I meant to do.

"*Hail, Mary, full of grace: the Lord is with thee . . .*"

I felt as if I were losing my reason. But it was of no use struggling against the awful impulse of self-sacrifice (for such I thought it) which had taken hold of my mind, and at last it conquered me.

"I must get money," I thought. "Unless I get money my child will die. I—must—get—money."

Towards seven o'clock I got up, gave baby to Mrs. Oliver, put on my coat and fixed with nervous fingers my hat and hatpins.

"Where are you going to, pore thing?" asked Mrs. Oliver.

"I am going out. I'll be back in the morning," I answered.

And then, after kneeling and kissing my baby again—my sweet child, my Isabel—I tore the street door open, and pulled it noisily behind me.

ONE HUNDRED AND FOURTH CHAPTER

On reaching the front street, I may have taken the penny tram, for though I had a sense of growing blind and deaf I have vague memories of lights flashing past me and of the clanging of electric cars.

At Bow Church I must have got out (probably to save a further fare) because I recollect walking along the Bow Road between the lights in the shops and the coarse flares from the stalls on the edge of the pavement, where women with baskets on their arms were doing their Saturday night's shopping.

My heart was still strong (sharpened indeed into poignancy) and I know I was not crying, for at one moment as I passed the mirror in a chemist's window I caught sight of my face and it was fierce as flame.

At another moment, while I was hurrying along, I collided with a drunken woman who was coming out of a public-house with her arm about the neck of a drunken sailor.

"Gawd! Here's the Verging Mary agine!" she cried.

It was the woman who had carried baby, and when I tried to hurry past her she said:

"You think I'm drunk, don't you, dear? So'am. Don't you never get drunk? No? What a bleedin' fool you are! Want to get out o' this 'ere 'ole? Tike my tip then—gettin' drunk's on'y way out of it."

Farther on I had to steer my way through jostling companies of young people of both sexes who were going (I thought) the same way as the woman—girls out of the factories with their free walk, and their boisterous "fellers" from the breweries.

It was a cold and savage night. As I approached the side street in which I lived I saw by the light of the arc lamps a small group of people, a shivering straggle of audience, with the hunched-up shoulders of beings thinly clad and badly fed, standing in stupid silence at the corner while two persons wearing blue uniforms (a man in a peaked cap and a young woman in a poke bonnet) sang a Salvation hymn of which the refrain was "It is well, it is well with my soul."

The door of the Jew's house was shut (for the first time in my experience), so I had to knock and wait, and while I waited I could not help but hear the young woman in the poke bonnet pray.

Her prayer was about "raising the standard of Calvary," and making the drunkards and harlots of the East End into "seekers" and "soul yielders" and "prisoners of the King of Kings."

Before the last words of the prayer were finished the man in the peaked cap tossed up his voice in another hymn, and the young woman joined him with an accordion:

"Shall we gather at the river,
Where bright angel feet have trod. . . ."

The door was opened by the Jew himself, who, assuming a severe manner, said something to me in his guttural voice which I did not hear or heed, for I pushed past him and walked firmly upstairs.

When I had reached my room and lit the gas, I closed and locked the door, as if I were preparing to commit a crime—and perhaps I was.

I did not allow myself to think of what I intended to do that night, but I knew quite well, and when at one moment my conscience pressed me hard something cried out in my heart:

"Who can blame me since my child's life is in danger?"

I opened my trunk and took out my clothes—all that remained of the dresses I had brought from Ellan. They were few, and more than a little out of fashion, but one of them, though far from gay, was bright and stylish—a light blue frock with a high collar and some white lace over the bosom.

I remember wondering why I had not thought of pawning it during the week, when I had had so much need of money, and then being glad that I had not done so.

It was thin and light, being the dress I had worn on the day I first came to the East End, carrying my baby to Ilford, when the weather was warm which now was cold; but I paid no heed to that, thinking only that it was my best and most attractive.

After I had put it on and glanced at myself in my little swinging looking-glass I was pleased, but I saw at the same time that my face was deadly pale, and that made me think of some bottles and cardboard boxes which lay in the pockets of my trunk.

I knew what they contained—the remains of the cosmetics which I had bought in Cairo in the foolish days when I was trying to make my husband love me. Never since then had I looked at them, but now I took them out (with a hare's foot and some pads and brushes) and began to paint my pale face—reddening my cracked and colourless lips and powdering out the dark rings under my eyes.

While I was doing this I heard (though I was trying not to) the deadened sound of the singing in the front street, with the young woman's treble voice above the man's bass and the wheezing of the accordion:

"Yes, we'll gather at the river,
Where bright angel feet have trod,
With its crystal tide for ever
Flowing by the throne of God."

The Dark Spirit must have taken possession of me by this time, poor vessel of conflicting passions as I was, for I remember that while I listened I laughed—thinking what mockery it was to sing of "angel feet and "crystal tides" to those shivering wretches at the corner of the London street in the smoky night air.

"What a farce!" I thought. "What a heartless farce!"

Then I put on my hat, which was also not very gay, and taking out of my trunk a pair of long light gloves which I had never worn since I left Ellan, I began to pull them on.

I was standing before the looking-glass in the act of doing this, and trying (God pity me!) to smile at myself, when I was suddenly smitten by a new thought.

I was about to commit suicide—the worst kind of suicide, not the suicide which is followed by oblivion, but by a life on earth after death!

After that night Mary O'Neill would no longer exist! I should never be able to think of her again! I should have killed her and buried her and stamped the earth down on her and she would be gone from me for ever!

That made a grip at my heart—awakening memories of happy days in my childhood, bringing back the wild bliss of the short period of my great love, and even making me think of my life in Rome, with its confessions, its masses, and the sweetness of its church bells.

I was saying farewell to Mary O'Neill! And parting with oneself seemed so terrible that when I thought of it my heart seemed ready to burst.

"But who can blame me when my child's life is in danger?" I asked myself again, still tugging at my long gloves.

By the time I had finished dressing the Salvationists were going off to their barracks with their followers behind them. Under the singing I could faintly hear the shuffling of bad shoes, which made a sound like the wash of an ebbing tide over the teeth of a rocky beach—up our side street, past the Women's Night Shelter (where the beds never had time to become cool), and beyond the public-house with the placard in the window saying the ale sold there could be guaranteed to make anybody drunk for fourpence.

"We'll stand the storm, it won't be long,
And we'll anchor in the sweet by-and-by."

I listened and tried to laugh again, but I could not do so now. There was one last spasm of my cruelly palpitating heart, in which I covered my face with both hands, and cried:

"For baby's sake! For my baby's sake!"

And then I opened my bedroom door, walked boldly downstairs and went out into the streets.

MEMORANDUM BY MARTIN CONRAD

I don't call it Chance that this was the very day of my return to England.

If I had to believe that, I should have to disbelieve half of what is best in the human story, and the whole of what we are taught about a guiding Providence and the spiritual influences which we cannot reason about and prove.

We were two days late arriving, having made dirty weather of it in the Bay of Biscay, which injured our propeller and compelled us to lie to, so I will not say that the sense of certainty which came to me off Finisterre did not suffer a certain shock.

In fact the pangs of uncertainty grew so strongly upon me as we neared home that in the middle of the last night of our voyage I went to O'Sullivan's cabin, and sat on the side of his bunk for hours, talking of the chances of my darling being lost and of the possibility of finding her.

O'Sullivan, God bless him, was "certain sure" that everything would be right, and he tried to take things gaily.

"The way I'm knowing she'll be at Southampton in a new hat and feather! So mind yer oi, Commanther."

We passed the Channel Islands in the spring of morning, and at breakfast-time we picked up the pilot, who had brought out a group of reporters. I did my best for the good chaps (though it is mighty hard to talk about exploring when you are thinking of another subject), and then handed them over to my shipmates.

Towards seven o'clock at night we heaved up to the grey stone pier at the head of Southampton Water. It was then dark, so being unable to see more than the black forms and waving hands of the crowd waiting for us with the lights behind them, I arranged with O'Sullivan that he should slip ashore as soon as we got alongside, and see if he could find my dear one.

"Will you remember her face?" I asked.

"And why wouldn't I? By the stars of God, there's only one of it in the world," he answered.

The welcome we got when we were brought to was enough to make a vain man proud, and a modest one ashamed, and perhaps I should have had a little of both feelings if the right woman had been there to share them.

My state-room was on the promenade deck, and I stood at the door of it as long as I dared, raising my cap at the call of my name, but feeling as if I were the loneliest man in the world, God help me!

O'Sullivan had not returned when Treacle came to say that everything was ready, and it was time to go ashore.

I will not say that I was not happy to be home; I will not pretend that the warm-hearted welcome did not touch me; but God knows there was a moment when, for want of a face I did not see, I could have turned about and gone back to the South Pole there and then, without an instant's hesitation.

When I got ashore I had as much as I could do to stand four-square to the storm of hand-shaking that fell on me. And perhaps if I had been in better trim I should have found lots of fun in the boyish delight of my shipmates in being back, with old Treacle shaking hands with everybody from the Mayor of the town to the messenger-boys (crying "What cheer, matey?"), while the scientific staff were bringing up their wives to be introduced to me, just as the lower-form fellows used to do with their big sisters at school.

At last O'Sullivan came back with a long face to say he could see nothing of my dear one, and then I braced myself and said:

"Never mind! She'll be waiting for us in London perhaps."

It took a shocking time to pass through the Customs, but we got off at last in a special train commissioned by our chairman—half of our company with their wives and a good many reporters having crammed themselves into the big saloon carriage reserved for me.

At the last moment somebody threw a sheaf of evening papers through my window, and as soon as we were well away I took up one of them and tried to read it, but column after column fell blank on my eyes, for my mind was full of other matters.

The talk in the carriage, too, did not interest me in the least. It was about the big, bustling, resonant world, general elections, the fall of ministries, Acts of Parliament, and the Lord knows what—things that had looked important when we were in the dumb solitude of Winter Quarters, but seemed to be of no account now when I was hungering for something else.

At last I got a quiet pressman in a corner and questioned him about Ellan.

"That's my native island, you know—anything going on there?"

The reporter said yes, there was some commotion about the failure of banks, with the whole island under a cloud, and its biggest financial man gone smash.

"Is his name O'Neill?" I asked.

"That's it."

"Anything else happened there while I've been away?"

"No . . . yes . . . well, now that I think of it, there was a big scare a year or so ago about a young peeress who disappeared mysteriously."

"Was . . . was it Lady Raa?"

"Yes," said the reporter, and then (controlling myself as well as I could) I listened to a rapid version of what had become known about my dear one down to the moment when she "vanished as utterly as if she had been dropped into the middle of the Irish Sea."

It is of no use saying what I felt after that, except that flying in an express train to London, I was as impatient of space and time as if I had been in a ship down south stuck fast in the rigid besetment of the ice.

I could not talk, and I dared not think, so I shouted for a sing-song, and my shipmates (who had been a little low at seeing me so silent) jumped at the proposal like schoolboys let loose from school.

Of course O'Sullivan gave us "The Minsthrel Boy"; and Treacle sang "Yew are the enny"; and then I, yes I (Oh, God!), sang "Sally's the gel," and every man of my company joined in the ridiculous chorus.

Towards ten o'clock we changed lines on the loop at Waterloo and ran into Charing Cross, where we found another and still bigger crowd of hearty people behind a barrier, with a group of my committee, my fellow explorers, and geographers in general, waiting on the platform.

I could not help it if I made a poor return to their warm-hearted congratulations, for my eyes were once more searching for a face I could not see, so that I was glad and relieved when I heard the superintendent say that the motor-car that was to take me to the hotel was ready and waiting.

But just then O'Sullivan came up and whispered that a priest and a nun were asking to speak to me, and he believed they had news of Mary.

The priest proved to be dear old Father Dan, and the nun to be Sister Veronica, whom my dear one calls Mildred. At the first sight of their sad-joyful faces something gripped me by the throat, for I knew what they had come to say before they said it—that my darling was lost, and Father Dan (after some priestly qualms) had concluded that I was the first man who ought to be told of it.

Although this was exactly what I had expected, it fell on me like a thunderbolt, and in spite of the warmth of my welcome home, I believe in my soul I was the most downhearted man alive.

Nevertheless I bundled Father Dan and the Sister and O'Sullivan into the automobile, and jumping in after them, told the chauffeur to drive like the deuce to the hotel.

He could not do that, though, for the crowd in the station-yard surrounded the car and shouted for a speech. I gave them one, saying heaven knows what, except that their welcome made me ashamed of not having got down to the Pole, but please God I should get there next time or leave my bones on the way.

We got to the hotel at last (the same that my poor stricken darling had stayed at after her honeymoon), and as soon as we reached my room I locked the door and said:

"Now out with it. And please tell me everything."

Father Dan was the first to speak, but his pulpit style was too slow for me in my present stress of thoughts and feelings. He had hardly got further than his difference with his Bishop, and the oath he had sworn by Him who died for us to come to London and never go back until he had found my darling, when I shook his old hand and looked towards the Sister.

She was quicker by a good deal, and in a few minutes I knew something of my dear one's story—how she had fled from home on my account, and for my sake had become poor; how she had lodged for a while in Bloomsbury; how hard she had been hit by the report of the loss of my ship; and how (Oh my poor, suffering, heroic, little woman!) she had disappeared on the approach of another event of still more serious consequence.

It was no time for modesty, not from me at all events, so while the Father's head was down, I asked plainly if there was a child, and was told there was, and the fear of having it taken from her (I could understand that) was perhaps the reason my poor darling had hidden herself away.

"And now, when, where, and by whom was she seen last?" I asked.

"Last week, and again to-day, to-night, here in the West End—by a fallen woman," answered the Sister.

"And what conclusion do you draw from that?"

The Sister hesitated for a moment and then said:

"That her child is dead; that she does not know you are alive; and that she is throwing herself away, thinking there is nothing left to live for."

"What?" I cried. "You believe that? Because she left that brute of a husband . . . and because she came to me . . . you believe that she could . . . Never! Not Mary O'Neill! She would beg her bread, or die in the streets first."

I dare say my thickening voice was betraying me; but when I looked at Mildred and saw the tears rolling down her cheeks and heard her excuses (it was "what hundreds of poor women were driven to every day"), I was ashamed and said so, and she put her kind hand in my hand in token of her forgiveness.

"But what's to be done now?" she asked.

O'Sullivan was for sending for the police, but I would not hear of that. I was beginning to feel as I used to do when I lost a comrade in a blizzard down south, and (without a fact or a clue to guide me) sent a score of men in a broad circle from the camp (like spokes in a wheel) to find him or follow back on their tracks.

There were only four of us, but I mapped out our courses, where we were to go, when we were to return, and what we were to do if any of us found my lost one—take her to Sister's flat, which she gave the address of.

It was half-past eleven when we started on our search, and I dare say our good old Father Dan, after his fruitless journeys, thought it a hopeless quest. But I had found myself at last. My spirits which had been down to zero had gone up with a bound. I had no ghost of an idea that I had been called home from the 88th latitude for nothing. And I had no fear that I had come too late.

Call it frenzy if you like—I don't much mind what people call it. But I was as sure as I have ever been of anything in this life, or ever expect to be, that the sufferings of my poor martyred darling were at an end, and that within an hour I should be holding her in my arms. M. C.

[End of Martin Conrad's Memorandum]

ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTH CHAPTER

There must be a physical power in fierce emotion to deprive us of the use of our senses of hearing and even of sight, for my memory of what happened after I left the Jew's has blank places in it.

Trying to recall the incidents of that night is like travelling on a moorland road under a flying moon, with sometimes the whitest light in which everything is clearly seen, and then the blackest darkness.

I remember taking the electric car going west, and seeing the Whitechapel Road shooting by me, with its surging crowds of pedestrians, its public-houses, its Cinema shows, and its Jewish theatres.

I remember getting down at Aldgate Pump, and walking through that dead belt of the City, which, lying between east and west, is alive like a beehive by day and silent and deserted by night.

I remember seeing an old man, with a face like a rat's, picking up cigar-ends from the gutters before the dark Banks, and then a flock of sheep bleating before a barking dog as they were driven through the echoing streets from the riverside towards the slaughter-houses near Smithfield Market.

I remember that when I came to St. Paul's the precincts of the cathedral were very quiet and the big clock was striking nine. But on Ludgate Hill the traffic was thick, and when I reached Fleet Street crowds of people were standing in front of the newspaper offices, reading large placards in written characters which were pasted on the windows.

I remember that I did not look at these placards, thinking their news was nothing to me, who had not seen a newspaper for months and for whom the world was now eclipsed, but that as I stepped round one of the crowds, which extended to the middle of the street, somebody said:

"He has landed at Southampton, it seems."

I remember that when I reached Charing Cross I found myself on the fringe of another and much larger crowd, and that the people, who seemed to be waiting for somebody and were chatting with a noise like the crackling of thorns under a pot, were saying:

"His train is fifty minutes late, so we've half an hour to wait yet."

Then I remember that walking at random round St. Martin's Church into Leicester Square I came upon three "public women" who were swinging along with a high step and laughing loudly, and that one of them was Angela, and that she stopped on seeing me and cried:

"Hello! Here I am again, you see! *Giovanni's dead, and I don't care a damn!*"

I remember that she said something else—it was about Sister Mildred, but my mind did not take it in—and at the next moment she left me, and I heard her laughter once more as she swept round the corner.

I hardly know what happened next, for here comes one of the blank places in my memory, with nothing to light it except vague thoughts of Martin (and that soulless night in Bloomsbury when the newspapers announced that he was lost), until, wandering aimlessly through streets and streets of people—such multitudes of people, no end of people—I found myself back at Charing Cross.

The waiting crowd was now larger and more excited than before, and the traffic at both sides of the station was stopped.

"He's coming! He's coming! Here he is!" the people cried, and then there were deafening shouts and cheers.

I recall the sight of a line of policemen pushing people back (I was myself pushed back); I recall the sight of a big motor car containing three men and a woman, ploughing its way through; I recall the sight of one of the men raising his cap; of the crowd rushing to shake hands with him; then of the car swinging away, and of the people running after it with a noise like that of the racing of a noisy river.

It is the literal truth that never once did I ask myself what this tumult was about, and that for some time after it was over—a full hour at least—I had a sense of walking in my sleep, as if my body were passing through the streets of the West End of London while my soul was somewhere else altogether.

Thus at one moment, as I was going by the National Gallery and thought I caught the sound of Martin's name, I felt as if I were back in Glen Raa, and it was I myself who had been calling it.

At another moment, when I was standing at the edge of the pavement in Piccadilly Circus, which was ablaze with electric light and thronged with people (for the theatres and music-halls were emptying, men in uniform were running about with whistles, policemen were directing the traffic, and streams of carriages were flowing by), I felt as if I were back in my native island, where I was alone on the dark shore while the sea was smiting me.

Again, after a brusque voice had said, "Move on, please," I followed the current of pedestrians down Piccadilly—it must have been Piccadilly—and saw lines of "public women," chiefly French and Belgian, sauntering along, and heard men throwing light words to them as they went by, I was thinking of the bleating sheep and the barking dog.

And again, when I was passing a men's club and the place where I had met Angela, my dazed mind was harking back to Ilford (with a frightened sense of the length of time since I had been there—"Good heavens, it must be five hours at least!"), and wondering if Mrs. Oliver was giving baby her drops of brandy and her spoonfuls of diluted milk.

But somewhere about midnight my soul seemed to take full possession of my body, and I saw things clearly and sharply as I turned out of Oxford Street into Regent Street.

The traffic was then rapidly dying down, the streets were darker, the cafés were closing, men and women were coming out of supper rooms, smoking cigarettes, getting into taxis and driving away; and another London day was passing into another night.

People spoke to me. I made no answer. At one moment an elderly woman said something to which I replied, "No, no," and hurried on. At another moment, a foreign-looking man addressed me, and I pushed past without replying. Then a string of noisy young fellows, stretching across the broad pavement arm-in-arm, encircled me and cried:

"Here we are, my dear. Let's have a kissing-bee."

But with angry words and gestures I compelled them to let me go, whereupon one of the foreign women who were sauntering by said derisively:

"What does she think she's out for, I wonder?"

At length I found myself standing under a kind of loggia at the corner of Piccadilly Circus, which was now half-dark, the theatres and music-halls being closed, and only one group of arc lamps burning on an island about a statue.

There were few people now where there had been so dense a crowd awhile ago; policemen were tramping leisurely along; horse-cabs were going at walking pace, and taxis were moving slowly; but a few gentlemen (walking home from their clubs apparently) were passing at intervals, often looking at me, and sometimes speaking as they went by.

Then plainly and pitilessly the taunt of the foreign woman came back to me—what was I there for?

I knew quite well, and yet I saw that not only was I not doing what I came out to do, but every time an opportunity had offered I had resisted it. It was just as if an inherited instinct of repulsion had restrained me, or some strong unseen arm had always snatched me away.

This led me—was it some angel leading me?—to think again of Martin and to remember our beautiful and sacred parting at Castle Raa.

"Whatever happens to either of us, we belong to each other for ever," he had said, and I had answered, "For ever and ever."

It was a fearful shock to think of this now. I saw that if I did what I had come out to do, not only would Mary O'Neill be dead to me after to-night, but Martin Conrad would be dead also.

When I thought of that I realised that, although I had accepted, without question, the newspaper reports of Martin's death, he had never hitherto been dead to me at all. He had lived with me every moment of my life since, supporting me, sustaining me and inspiring me, so that nothing I had ever done—not one single thing—would have been different if I had believed him to be alive and been sure that he was coming back.

But now I was about to kill Martin Conrad as well as Mary O'Neill, by breaking the pledge (sacred as any sacrament) which they had made for life and for eternity.

Could I do that? In this hideous way too? Never! Never! Never! I should die in the streets first.

I remember that I was making a movement to go back to Ilford (God knows how), when, on the top of all my brave thinking, came the pitiful thought of my child. My poor helpless little baby, who had made no promise and was party to no pledge. She needed nourishment and fresh air and sunshine, and if she could not get them—if I went back to her penniless—she would die!

My sweet darling! My Isabel, my only treasure! Martin's child and mine!

That put a quick end to all my qualms. Again I bit my lip until it bled, and told myself that I should speak to the very next man who came along.

"Yes, the very next man who comes along," I thought.

I was standing at that moment in the shadow of one of the pilasters of the loggia, almost leaning against it, and in the silence of the street I heard distinctly the sharp firm step of somebody coming my way.

It was a man. As he came near me he slowed down, and stopped. He was then immediately behind me. I heard his quick breathing. I felt that his eyes were fixed on me. One sidelong glance told me that he was wearing a long ulster and a cap, that he was young, tall, powerfully built, had a strong, firm, clean-shaven face, and an indescribable sense of the open air about him.

"Now, now!" I thought, and (to prevent myself from running away) I turned quickly round to him and tried to speak.

But I said nothing. I did not know what women say to men under such circumstances. I found myself trembling violently, and before I was aware of what was happening I had burst into tears.

Then came another blinding moment and a tempest of conflicting feelings.

I felt that the man had laid hold of me, that his strong hands were grasping my arms, and that he was looking into my face. I heard his voice. It seemed to belong to no waking moment but to come out of the hours of sleep.

"Mary! Mary!"

I looked up at him, but before my eyes could carry the news to my brain I knew who it was—I knew, I knew, I knew!

"Don't be afraid! It's I!"

Then something—God knows what—made me struggle to escape, and I cried:

"Let me go!"

But even while I was struggling—trying to fly away from my greatest happiness—I was praying with all my might that the strong arms would hold me, conquer me, master me.

They did. And then something seemed to give way within my head, and through a roaring that came into my brain I heard the voice again, and it was saying:

"Quick, Sister, call a cab. Open the door, O'Sullivan. No, leave her to me. I've got her, thank God!"

And then blinding darkness fell over me and everything was blotted out.

But only a moment afterwards (or what seemed to be a moment) memory came back in a great swelling wave of joy. Though I did not open my eyes I knew that I was safe and baby was safe, and all was well. Somebody—it was the same beloved voice again—was saying:

"Mally! My Mally! My poor, long-suffering darling! My own again, God bless her!"

It was he, it was Martin, my Martin. And, oh Mother of my Lord, he was carrying me upstairs in his arms.

SEVENTH PART

I AM FOUND

ONE HUNDRED AND SIXTH CHAPTER

My return to consciousness was a painful, yet joyful experience. It was almost like being flung in a frail boat out of a tempestuous sea into a quiet harbour.

I seemed to hear myself saying, " My child shall not die. Poverty shall not kill her. I am going to take her into the country . . . she will recover. . . . No, no, it is not Martin. Martin is dead. . . . But his eyes . . . don't you see his eyes. . . . Let me go."

Then all the confused sense of nightmare seemed to be carried away as by some mighty torrent, and there came a great calm, a kind of morning sweetness, with the sun shining through my closed eyelids, and not a sound in my ears but the thin carolling of a bird.

When I opened my eyes I was in bed in a room that was strange to me. It was a little like the Reverend Mother's room in Rome, having pictures of the Saints on the walls, and a large figure of the Sacred Heart over the mantelpiece; but there was a small gas fire, and a canary singing in a gilded cage that hung in front of the window.

I was trying to collect my senses in order to realize where I was when Sister Mildred's kind face, in her white wimple and gorget, leaned over me, and she said, with a tender smile, " You are awake now, my child? "

Then memory came rushing back, and though the immediate past was still like a stormy dream I seemed to remember everything.

"Is it true that I saw. . . .

"Yes," said Mildred.

"Then he was not shipwrecked?"

"That was a false report. Within a month or two the newspapers had contradicted it."

"Where is he?" I asked, rising from my pillow.

"Hush! Lie quiet. You are not to excite yourself. I must call the doctor."

Mildred was about to leave the room, but I could not let her go.

"Wait! I must ask you something more."

"Not now, my child. Lie down."

"But I must. Dear Sister, I must. There is somebody else."

"You mean the baby," said Mildred, in a low voice.

"Yes."

"She has been found, and taken to the country, and is getting better rapidly. So lie down, and be quiet," said Mildred, and with a long breath of happiness I obeyed.

A moment afterwards I heard her speaking to somebody over the telephone (saying I had recovered consciousness and was almost myself again), and then some indistinct words came back in the thick telephone voice like that of a dumb man shouting down a tunnel, followed by sepulchral peals of merry laughter.

"The doctor will be here presently," said Mildred, returning to me with a shining face.

"And . . . he?"

"Yes, perhaps he will be permitted to come, too."

She was telling me how baby had been discovered—by means of Mrs. Oliver's letter which had been found in my pocket—when there was the whirr of an electric bell in the corridor outside, followed (as soon as Mildred could reach the door) by the rich roll of an Irish voice.

It was Dr. O'Sullivan, and in a moment he was standing by my bed, his face ablaze with smiles.

"By the Saints of heaven, this is good, though," he said. "It's worth a hundred dozen she is already of the woman we brought here first."

"That was last night, wasn't it?" I asked.

"Well, not last night exactly," he answered. And then I gathered that I had been ill, seriously ill, being two days unconscious, and that Martin had been in a state of the greatest anxiety.

"He's coming, isn't he?" I said. "Will he be here soon? How does he look? Is he well? Did he finish his work?"

"Now, now, now," said the doctor, with uplifted hands. "If it's exciting yourself like this you're going to be, it isn't myself that will be taking the risk of letting him come at all."

But after I had pleaded and prayed and promised to be good he consented to allow Martin to see me, and then it was as much as I could do not to throw my arms about his neck and kiss him.

I had not noticed what Mildred was doing during this time, and almost before I was aware of it somebody else had entered the room.

It was dear old Father Dan.

"Glory be to God!" he cried at sight of me, and then he said:

"Don't worry, my daughter, now don't worry,"—with that nervous emphasis which I knew by long experience to be the surest sign of my dear Father's own perturbation.

I did not know then, or indeed until long afterwards, that for six months past he had been tramping the streets of London in search of me (day after day, and in the dark of the night and the cold of the morning); but something in his tender old face, which was seamed and worn, so touched me with the memory of the last scene in my mother's room that my eyes began to overflow, and seeing this he began to laugh and let loose his Irish tongue on us.

"My blissing on you, doctor! It's the mighty proud man ye'll be entoirely to be saving the life of the swatest woman in the world. And whisha, Sister, if ye have a nip of something neat anywhere handy, faith it isn't my cloth will prevent me from drinking the health of everybody."

If this was intended to cheer me up it failed completely, for the next thing I knew was that the doctor was bustling the dear old Father out of the room, and that Mildred was going out after him.

She left the door open, though, and as soon as I had calmed down a little I listened intently for every sound outside.

It was then that I heard the whirr of the electric bell again, but more softly this time, and followed by breathless whispered words in the corridor (as of some one who had been running) and once more . . . I knew, I knew, I knew!

After a moment Mildred came to ask me in a whisper if I was quite sure that I could control myself, and though my heart was thumping against my breast, I answered Yes.

Then I called for a hand-glass and made my hair a shade neater, and after that I closed my eyes (God knows why) and waited.

There was a moment of silence, dead silence, and then—

then I opened my eyes and saw him standing in the open doorway.

His big, strong, bronzed face—stronger than ever now, and marked with a certain change from the struggles he had gone through—was utterly broken up. For some moments he did not speak, but I could see that he saw the change that life had made in me also. Then in a low voice, so low that it was like the breath of his soul, he said:

"Forgive me! Forgive me!"

And stepping forward he dropped to his knees by the side of my bed, and kissed the arms and hands I was stretching out to him.

That was more than I could bear, and the next thing I heard was my darling's great voice crying:

"Sister! Sister! Some brandy! Quick! She has fainted."

But my poor little fit of hysterics was soon at an end, and though Martin was not permitted to stay more than a moment longer, a mighty wave of happiness flowed over me, such as I had never known before and may never know again.

ONE HUNDRED AND SEVENTH CHAPTER

I HAD such a beautiful convalescence. For the major operations of the Great Surgeon an anæsthetic has not yet been found, but within a week I was sitting up again, mutilated, perhaps, but gloriously alive and without the whisper of a cry.

By this time Father Dan had gone back to Ellan (parting from me with a solemn face as he said, "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace"), and Sister Mildred had obtained permission to give up one of her rooms to me as long as I should need it.

Martin came to see me every day, first for five minutes, then ten, and finally for a quarter and even half an hour. He brought such an atmosphere of health with him, that merely to hold his hand seemed to give me new strength—being so pale and bloodless now that I thought the sun might have shone through me as through a sea-gull.

I could scarcely believe it was not a dream that he was sitting by my side, and sometimes I felt as if I had to touch him to make sure he was there.

How he talked to keep up my spirits! It was nearly always about his expedition (never about me or my experiences, for that seemed a dark scene from which he would not draw the curtain), and I was all a-tremble as I listened to the story of his hair-breadth escapes, though he laughed and made so light of them.

It nearly broke my heart that he had not got down to the Pole; and when he told me that it was the sense of my voice calling to him which had brought him back from the 88th latitude, I felt as if I had been a coward, unworthy of the man who loved me.

Sometimes he talked about baby—he called her " Girlie " —telling a funny story of how he had carried her off from Ilford, where the bricklayer had suddenly conceived such a surprising affection for my child (" what he might go so far as to call a fatherly feeling ") that he had been unwilling to part with her until soothed down by a few sovereigns—not to say frightened by a grasp of Martin's iron hand which had nearly broken his wrist.

" She's as right as a trivet now, though," said Martin, " and I'll run down to Chevening every other day to see how she's getting on."

My darling was in great demand from the first, but when he could not be with me in the flesh he was with me in the spirit, by means of the newspapers which Mildred brought up in armfuls.

I liked the illustrated ones best, with their pictures of scenes in the Expedition, particularly the portraits of Martin himself in his Antarctic outfit, with his broad throat, determined lips, clear eyes, and that general resemblance to the people we all know which makes us feel that the great men of every age are brothers of one family.

But what literary tributes there were, too! What interviews, what articles! A member of the scientific staff had said that " down there," with Nature in her wrath, where science was nothing and even physical strength was not all, only one thing really counted, and that was the heroic soul, and because Martin had it, he had always been the born leader of them all.

And then, summing up the tangible gains of the Expedition, the *Times* said its real value was moral and spiritual, because it showed that in an age when one half of the world seemed to be thinking of nothing but the acquisition of wealth (that made me think of my father) and the other half of nothing but the pursuit of pleasure (that reminded me of my husband and Alma), there could be found men like

Martin Conrad and his dauntless comrades who had faced death for the sake of an ideal and were ready to do so again.

Oh dear! what showers of tears I shed over those newspapers! But the personal honours that were bestowed on Martin touched me most of all.

First, the Royal Geographical Society held a meeting at the Albert Hall, where the Gold Medal was presented to him. I was in a fever of anxiety on the night of that function, I remember, until Dr. O'Sullivan (heaven bless him!) came flying upstairs, to tell me that it had been a "splendid success," and Martin's speech (he hadn't prepared a word of it) " a perfect triumph."

Then some of the Universities conferred degrees on my darling, which was a source of inexpressible amusement to him, especially when (after coming back from Edinburgh) he marched up and down my room in his Doctor's cap and gown, and I asked him to spell " promise " and he couldn't.

Oh, the joy of it all! It was so great a joy that at length it became a pain.

The climax came when the Home Secretary wrote to say that the King had been graciously pleased to confer a Knighthood upon Martin, in recognition of his splendid courage and the substantial contribution he had already made to the material welfare of the world.

That frightened me terribly, though only a woman would know why. It was one thing to share the honours of the man I loved (however secretly and as it were by stealth), but quite another thing to feel that they were carrying him away from me, drawing him off, lifting him up, and leaving me far below.

When the sense of this became acute I used to sit at night, when Mildred was out at her work, by the lofty window of her room, looking down on the precincts of Piccadilly, and wondering how much my darling really knew about the impulse that took me there, and how nearly (but for the grace of God) its awful vortex had swallowed me up.

It was then that I began to write these notes (having persuaded Mildred to buy me this big book with its silver clasp and key), not intending at first to tell the whole story of my life, but only to explain to him for whom everything has been written (what I could not bring myself to say face to face), how it came to pass that I was tempted to that sin which is the most awful crime against her sex that a woman can commit.

Three months had gone by this time, the spring was coming, and I was beginning to feel that Martin (who had not yet been home) was being kept in London on my account, when Dr. O'Sullivan announced that I was well enough to be moved, and that a little of my native air would do me good.

Oh, the thrill that came with that prospect! I suppose there is a sort of call to one's heart from the soil that gave one birth, but in my case it was coupled with a chilling thought of the poor welcome I should receive there, my father's house being closed to me and my husband's abandoned for ever.

The very next morning, however, there came a letter from Father Dan, giving me all the news of Ellan: some of it sad enough, God knows (about the downfall of my father's financial schemes); some of it deliciously wicked, such as it would have required an angel not to rejoice in (about the bad odour in which Alma and my husband were now held, making the pendulum of popular feeling swing back in my direction); and some of it utterly heart-breaking in its assurances of the love still felt for me in my native place.

Of course the sweetest part of that came from Christian Ann, who, after a stiff fight with her moral principles, had said that whatever I had done I was as " pure as the mountain turf," and, who then charged Father Dan with the message that " Mary O'Neill's little room " was waiting for her still.

This settled everything—everything except one thing, and that was the greatest thing of all. But when Martin came later the same day, having received the same message, and declared his intention of taking me home, there seemed to be nothing left to wish for in earth or heaven.

Nevertheless I shouldn't have been a woman if I had not coquetted with my great happiness, so when Martin had finished I said:

" But dare you? "

" Dare I—what? " said Martin.

" Dare you go home . . . with *me?* "

I knew what I wanted him to say, and he said it like a darling.

" Look here, Mary, I'm just spoiling for a sight of the little island, and the old people are destroyed at not seeing me; but if I can't go back with you, by the Lord God! I'll never go back at all."

I wanted to see baby before going away, but that was forbidden me.

" Wait until you're well enough, and we'll send her after you," said Dr. O'Sullivan.

So the end of it all was that inside a week I was on my way to Ellan, not only with Martin, but also with Mildred, who, being a little out of health herself, had been permitted to take me home.

Shall I ever forget our arrival at Blackwater! The steamer we sailed in was streaming with flags from stem to stern, and as she slid up the harbour the dense crowds that packed the pier from end to end seemed frantic with excitement. Such shouting and cheering! Such waving of hats and handkerchiefs!

There was a sensible pause, I thought, a sort of hush, when the gangway being run down, Martin was seen to give his arm to me, and I was recognised as the lost and dishonoured one.

But even that only lasted for a moment. It was almost as if the people felt that this act of Martin's was of a piece with the sacred courage that had carried him down near to the Pole, for hardly had he brought me ashore, and put me into the automobile waiting to take us away, when the cheering broke out into almost delirious tumult.

I knew it was all for Martin, but not even the humility of my position, and the sense of my being an added cause of my darling's glory, could make me otherwise than proud and happy.

We drove home, with the sunset in our faces, over the mountain road which I had crossed with my husband on the day of my marriage; and when we came to our own village I could not help seeing that a little—just a little—of the welcome waiting for us was meant for me.

Father Dan was there. He got into the car and sat by my side; and then some of the village women, who had smartened themselves up in their Sunday clothes, reached over and shook hands with me, speaking about things I had said and done as a child and had long forgotten.

We had to go at a walking pace the rest of the way, and while Martin saluted old friends (he remembered everybody by name) Father Dan talked in my ear about the " domestic earthquake " that had been going on at Sunny Lodge, everything topsy-turvy until to-day, the little room being made ready for me, and the best bedroom (the doctor's and Christian Ann's) for Martin, and the " loft " over the dairy for the old people themselves—as if their beloved son had been good in not forgetting them, and had condescended in coming home.

"Is it true?" they had asked each other. "Is he really, really coming?" "What does he like to eat, mother?" "What does he drink?" "What does he smoke?"

I had to close my eyes as I came near the gate of my father's house, and, except for the rumbling of the river under the bridge and the cawing of the rooks in the elms, I should not have known when we were there.

The old doctor (his face overflowing with happiness, and his close-cropped white head bare, as if he had torn out of the house at the toot of our horn) met us as we turned into the lane, and for the little that was left of our journey he walked blithely as a boy by the car, at the side on which Martin sat.

I reached forward to catch the first sight of Sunny Lodge, and there it was behind its fuchsia hedge, which was just breaking into bloom.

There was Christian Ann, too, at the gate in her sunbonnet; and before the automobile had come to a stand Martin was out of it and had her in his arms.

I knew what that meant to the dear sweet woman, and for a moment my spirits failed me, because it flashed upon my mind that perhaps her heart had only warmed to me for the sake of her son.

But just as I was stepping out of the car, feeling physically weak and slipping a little, though Father Dan and Sister Mildred were helping me to alight, my Martin's mother rushed at me and gathered me in her arms, crying:

"Goodness gracious me, doctor—if it isn't little Mary O'Neill, God bless her!"—just as she did in the old, old days when I came as a child "singing carvals to her door."

ONE HUNDRED AND EIGHTH CHAPTER

WHEN I awoke next morning in "Mary O'Neill's little room," with its odour of clean white linen and sweet-smelling scraas, the sun was shining in at the half-open window, birds were singing, cattle were lowing, young lambs were bleating, a crow was cawing its way across the sky, and under the sounds of the land there was a far-off murmur of the sea.

Through the floor (unceiled beneath) I could hear the Doctor and Christian Ann chortling away in low tones like two cheerful old love-birds; and when I got up and looked out I saw the pink and white blossom of the apple and plum trees, and smelt the smoke of burning peat from the chimney, as well as the salt of the sea-weed from the shore.

Sister Mildred came to help me to dress, and when I went downstairs to the sweet kitchen-parlour, feeling so strong and fresh, Christian Ann, who was tossing an oat-cake she was baking on the griddle, cried to me, as to a child:

"Come your ways, *villish;* you know the house."

And when I stepped over the rag-work hearthrug and sat in the "elbow-chair" in the *chiollagh,* under the silver bowls that stood on the high mantelpiece, she cried again, as if addressing the universe in general, for there was nobody else in the room:

"Look at that now! She's been out in the big world, and seen great wonders, and a power of people I'll go bail, but there she is, as nice and comfortable as if she had never been away!"

Sister Mildred came down next; and then the old doctor, who had been watching the road for Martin (he had refused to occupy the old people's bedroom after all and had put up at the "Plough"), came in, saying:

"The boy's late, mother—what's doing on him, I wonder?"

We waited awhile longer, and then sat down to breakfast. Oh, the homely beauty of that morning meal, with its porridge, its milk, its honey and cakes, its butter like gold, and its eggs like cream!

In spite of Sister Mildred's protests Christian Ann stood and served, and I will not say that for me there was not a startling delight in being waited upon once more, being asked what I would like, and getting it, giving orders and being obeyed—me, me, me!

At length in the exercise of my authority I insisted on Christian Ann sitting down too, which she did, though she didn't eat, but went on talking in her dear, simple, delicious way.

It was always about Martin, and the best of it was about her beautiful faith that he was still alive when the report came that he had been lost at sea.

What? Her son dying like that, and she old and the sun going down on her? Never! Newspapers? Chut, who cared what people put in the papers? If Martin had really been lost, wouldn't *she* have known it—having borne him on her bosom ("a middling hard birth, too"), and being the first to hear his living voice in the world?

So while people thought she was growing "weak in her intellects," she had clung to the belief that her beloved son would come back to her. And behold! one dark night in winter, when she was sitting in the *chiollagh* alone, and the wind was loud in the trees, and the doctor upstairs was calling on her to come to bed ("you're wearing yourself away, woman"), she heard a sneck of the garden gate and a step on the gravel path, and it was old Tommy the Mate, who without waiting for her to open the door let a great yell out of him through the window that a "talegraf" had come to say her boy was safe.

Father Dan looked in after mass, in his biretta and faded cassock (the same, I do declare, that he had worn when I was a child), and then Martin himself came swinging up, with his big voice, like a shout from the quarter-deck.

"Helloa! Stunning morning, isn't it?"

It was perfectly delightful to see the way he treated his mother, though there was not too much reverence in his teasing, and hardly more love than license.

When she told him to sit down if he had not forgotten the house, and said she hoped he had finished looking for South Poles and was ready to settle quietly at home, and he answered No, he would have to go back to London presently, she cried:

"There now, doctor? What was I telling you? Once they've been away, it's witched they are—longing and longing to go back again. What's there in London that's wanting him?"

Whereupon the doctor (thinking of the knighthood), with a proud lift of his old head and a wink at Father Dan, said:

"Who knows? Perhaps it's the King that's wanting him, woman."

"The King?" cried Christian Ann. "He's got a bonny son of his own, they're telling me, so what for should he be wanting mine?"

"Mary," said Martin, as soon as he could speak for laughing, "do you want a mother? I've got one to sell, and I wouldn't trust but I might give her away."

"Cuff him, Mrs. Conrad," cried Father Dan. "Cuff him, the young rascal! He may be a big man in the great world over the water, but he mustn't come here expecting his mother and his old priest to worship him."

How we laughed! I laughed until I cried, not knowing which I was doing most, but feeling as if I had never had an ache or a care in all my life before.

Breakfast being over, the men going into the garden to smoke, and Sister Mildred insisting on clearing the table, Christian Ann took up her knitting, sat by my side, and told me the "newses" of home—sad news, most of it, about my father, God pity him, and how his great schemes for "galvanising the old island into life" had gone down to failure and fatuity, sending some to the asylum and some to the graveyard, and certain of the managers of corporations and banks to gaol.

My father himself had escaped prosecution; but he was supposed to be a ruined man, dying of cancer, and had gone to live in his mother's old cottage on the curragh, with only Nessy McLeod to care for him—having left the Big House to Aunt Bridget and cousin Betsy, who declared (so I gathered or guessed) that I had disgraced their name and should never look on their faces again.

"But dear heart alive, that won't cut much ice, will it?" said Christian Ann, catching a word of Martin's.

Later in the day, being alone with the old doctor, I heard something of my husband also—that he had applied (according to the laws of Ellan) for an Act of Divorce, and that our insular legislature was likely to grant it.

Still later, having walked out into the garden, where the bluebells were in bloom, I, too, heard the sneck of the gate, and it was old Tommy again, who (having been up to the "Plough" to "put a sight on himself") had come round to welcome me as well—a little older, a little feebler, "tacking a bit," as he said, with "romps in his fetlock joints," but feeling "well tremenjus."

He had brought the "full of his coat-pockets" of lobsters and crabs for me ("wonderful good for invalids, missie") and the "full of his mouth" of the doings at Castle Raa, which he had left immediately after myself—Price also, neither of them being willing to stay with a master who had "the rough word" for everybody, and a "misthress" who had "the black curse on her" that would "carry her naked sowl to hell."

"I wouldn't be gardener there, after the lil missie had gone . . . no, not for the Bank of Ellan and it full of goold."

What a happy, happy day that was! There was many another day like it, too, during the sweet time following, when spring was smiling once more upon earth and man, and body and soul in myself were undergoing a resurrection no less marvellous.

After three or four weeks I had so far recovered as to be able to take walks with Martin—through the leafy lanes with the golden gorse on the high turf hedges and its nutty odour in the air, as far, sometimes, as to the shore, where we talked about "asploring" or perhaps (without speaking at all) looked into each other's eyes and laughed.

There was really only one limitation to my happiness, separation from my child, and though I was conscious of something anomalous in my own position which the presence of my baby would make acute (setting all the evil tongues awag), I could not help it if, as I grew stronger, I yearned for my little treasure.

The end of it was that, after many timid efforts, I took courage and asked Martin if I might have my precious darling back.

"Girlie?" he cried. "Certainly you may. You are well enough now, so why shouldn't you? I'm going to London on Exploration business soon, and I'll bring her home with me."

But when he was gone (Mildred went with him) I was still confronted by one cause of anxiety—Christian Ann. I could not even be sure she knew of the existence of my child, still less that Martin intended to fetch her.

So once more I took my heart in both hands, and while we sat together in the garden, with the sunlight pouring through the trees, Christian Ann knitting and I pretending to read, I told her all.

She knew everything already, the dear old thing, and had only been waiting for me to speak. After dropping a good many stitches she said:

"The world will talk, and dear heart knows what Father Dan himself will say. But blood's thicker than water, even if it's holy water, and she's my own child's child, God bless her!"

After that we had such delicious times together, preparing for the little stranger who was to come—cutting up blankets and sheets, and smuggling down from the "loft" to "Mary O'Neill's room" the wooden cradle which had once been Martin's, and covering it with bows and ribbons.

We kept the old doctor in the dark (pretended we did) and when he wondered "what all the fuss was about," and if "the island expected a visit from the Queen," we told him (Christian Ann did) to "ask us no questions and we'd tell no lies."

What children we were, we two mothers, the old one and the young one! I used to hint, with an air of great mystery, that my baby had "somebody's eyes," and then the dear simple old thing would say:

"Somebody's eyes, has she? Well, well! Think of that, now!"

But Christian Ann, from the lofty eminence of the motherhood of one child twenty-five years before, was my general guide and counsellor, answering all my foolish questions when I counted up baby's age (eleven months now) and wondered if she could walk and talk by this time, how many of her little teeth should have come and whether she could remember me.

As the time approached for Martin's return our childishness increased, and on the last day of all we carried on such a game together as must have made the very Saints themselves look down on us and laugh.

Before I opened my eyes in the morning I was saying to myself, "Now they're on their way to Euston," and every time I heard the clock strike I was thinking, "Now they're in the train," or "Now they're at Liverpool," or "Now they're on the steamer"; but all the while I sang "Sally" and other nonsense, and pretended to be as happy as the day was long.

Christian Ann was even more excited than myself; and though she was always reproving me for my nervousness and telling me to be composed, I saw her put the kettle instead of the tea-pot on to the tablecloth, and the porridge-stick into the fire in place of the tongs.

Towards evening, when Martin was due, I had reduced myself to such a state of weakness that Christian Ann wanted to put me to bed; but sitting down in the *chiollagh*, and watching the road from the imprisonment of the "elbow-chair," I saw at last the two big white eyes of the automobile wheeling round in the dusk by the gate of my father's house.

A few minutes afterwards Martin came sweeping into the kitchen with a nice-looking nurse behind him, carrying my darling at her breast.

She was asleep, but the light of the fire soon wakened her, and then a strange thing happened.

I had risen from my seat, and Christian Ann had come hurrying up, and we two women were standing about baby, both ready to clutch at her, when she blinked her blue eyes and looked at us, and then held out her arms to her grandmother!

That nearly broke my heart for a moment (though now I thank the Lord for it), but it raised Christian Ann into the seventh heaven of rapture.

"Did you see that now?" she cried, clasping my baby to her bosom—her eyes glistening as with sunshine, though her cheeks were slushed as with rain.

I got my treasure to myself at last (Christian Ann having to show the nurse up to her bedroom), and then, being alone with Martin, I did not care, in the intoxication of my happiness, how silly I was in my praise of her.

"Isn't she a little fairy, a little angel, a little cherub?" I cried. "And that nasty, nasty birthmark quite, quite gone."

The ugly word had slipped out unawares, but Martin had caught it, and though I tried to make light of it, he gave me no peace until I had told him what it meant—with all the humiliating story of my last night at Castle Raa and the blow my husband had struck me.

"But that's all over now," I said.

"Is it? By the Lord God I swear it isn't, though!" said Martin, and his face was so fierce that it made me afraid.

But just at that moment Christian Ann came downstairs, and the old doctor returned from his rounds, and then Tommy the Mate looked in on his way to the "Plough," and hinting at my going to church again some day, gave it as his opinion that if I put the "boght millish" under my "perricut" (our old island custom for legitimising children) "the Bishop himself couldn't say nothin' against it"—at which Martin laughed so much that I thought he had forgotten his vow about my husband.

MEMORANDUM OF MARTIN CONRAD

I hadn't, though.

The brute! The bully! When my darling told me that story (I had to drag it out of her) I felt that if I had been within a hundred miles at the time, and had had to crawl home to the man on my hands and knees, there wouldn't have been enough of him left now to throw on the dust-heap.

Nearly two years had passed since the debt was incurred, but I thought a Christian world could not go on a day longer until I had paid it back—with interest.

So fearing that my tender-hearted little woman, if she got wind of my purpose, might make me promise to put away my vow of vengeance, I got up early next morning and ordered the motor-car to be made ready for a visit to Castle Raa.

Old Tommy happened to be in the yard of the inn while I was speaking to the chauffeur, and he asked if he might be allowed to go with me. I agreed, and when I came out to start he was sitting in a corner of the car, with his Glengarry pulled down over his shaggy eyebrows, and his knotty hands leaning on a thick blackthorn that had a head as big as a turnip.

We did not talk too much on the way—I had to save up my strength for better business—and it was a long spin, but we got to our journey's end towards the middle of the morning.

As we went up the drive (sacred to me by one poignant memory) an open carriage was coming down. The only occupant was a rather vulgar-looking elderly woman (in large feathers and flowing furbelows) whom I took to be the mother of Alma.

Three powdered footmen came to the door of the Castle as our car drove up. Their master was out riding. They did not know when he would be back.

"I'll wait for him," I said, and pushed into the hall, old Tommy following me.

I think the footmen had a mind to intercept us, but I suppose there was something in my face which told them it would be better not to try, so I walked into the first room with the door open.

It turned out to be the dining-room, with portraits of the owner's ancestors all round the walls—a solid square of evil-looking rascals, every mother's son of them.

Tommy, still resting his knotty hands on his big blackthorn, was sitting on the first chair by the door, and I on the end of the table, neither saying a word to the other, when there came the sound of horses' hoofs on the path outside. A little later there were voices in the hall, both low and loud ones—the footmen evidently announcing my arrival and their master abusing them for letting me into the house.

At the next moment the man came sweeping into the dining-room. He was carrying a heavy hunting-crop and his flabby face was livid. Behind him came Alma. She was in riding costume and was bending a lithe whip in her gloved hands.

I saw that my noble lord was furious, but that mood suited me as well as another, so I continued to sit on the end of the table.

"So I hear, sir," he said, striding up to me, "I hear that you have taken possession of my place without so much as 'by your leave'?"

"That's so," I answered.

"Haven't you done enough mischief here, without coming to insult me by your presence?"

"Not quite. I've a little more to do before I've finished."

"Jim," said the woman (in such a weary voice), "don't put yourself about over such a person. Better ring the bell for the servants and have him turned out of doors."

I looked round at her. She tried an insolent smile, but it broke down badly, and then his lordship strode up to me with quivering lips.

"Look here, sir," he said. "Aren't you ashamed to show your face in my house?"

"I'm not," I replied. "But before I leave it, I believe *you'll* be ashamed to show your face anywhere."

"Damn it, sir! Will you do me the honour to tell me why you are here?" said his lordship, with fury in his looks.

"Certainly. That's exactly what I've come for," I said, and then I stated my business without more ado.

I told him what he had done to the woman who was ten thousand times too good to be his wife—torturing her with his cruelties, degrading her with his infidelities, subjecting her to the domination of his paramour, and finally striking her in the face like a coward and a cur.

"Liar!" he cried, fairly gasping in his rage. "You're a liar and your informant is a liar, too."

"Tommy," I said, "will you step outside for a moment?"

Tommy went out of the room at once, and the woman, who was now looking frightened, tried to follow him.

I stopped her. Rising from the table, I stepped over to the door and locked it.

"No, madam," I said. "I want you to see what takes place between his lordship and me."

The wretched woman fell back, but the man, grinding his teeth, came marching up to me.

"So you've come to fight me in my own house, have you?" he cried.

"Not at all," I answered. "A man fights his equal. I've come *to thrash you.*"

That was enough for him. He lifted his hunting-crop to strike, but it didn't take long to get that from his hand or to paralyse the arm with which he was lunging out at me.

And then, seizing him by the white stock at his throat, I thrashed him. I thrashed him as I should have thrashed a vicious ape. I thrashed him while he fumed and foamed, and cursed and swore. I thrashed him while he cried for help, and then yelled with pain and whined for mercy. I thrashed him under the eyes of his ancestors, the mad, bad race he came from, and him the biggest blackguard of them all. And then I flung him to the ground, bruised in every bone, and his hunting-crop after him.

"I hear you're going to court for an Act of Divorce," I said. "Pity you can't take something to back you, so take that, and say I gave it you."

I was turning towards the door when I heard a low, whining cry, like that of a captured she-bear. It was from the woman. The wretched creature was on her knees at the farthest corner of the room, apparently mumbling prayers, as if in terror that her own turn might be coming next.

In her sobbing fear I thought she looked more than ever like a poisonous snake, and I will not say that the old impulse to put my foot on it did not come back for a moment. But I only said as I passed, pointing to the writhing worm on the floor:

"Look at him, madame. I wish you joy of your nobleman, and him of you."

Then I opened the door, and notwithstanding the grim business I had been going through, I could have laughed at the scene outside.

There was old Tommy with his back to the dining-room door, his Glengarry awry on his tousled head, and his bandy legs stretched firmly apart, flourishing his big-headed blackthorn before the faces of the three powdered footmen, and inviting them to "come on."

"Come on, now, you bleating ould billy-goats, come on, come on!"

I was in no hurry to get away, but lit a cigar in front of the house while the chauffeur was starting the motor and Tommy was wiping his steaming forehead on the sleeve of his coat.

All the way home the old man talked without ceasing, sometimes to me, and sometimes to the world in general.

"You gave him a piece of your mind, didn't you?" he asked, with a wink of his "starboard eye."

"I believe I did," I answered.

"I allus said you would. 'Wait till himself is after coming home, and it'll be the devil sit up for some of them,' says I."

There was only one limitation to Tommy's satisfaction over our day's expedition—that he had not cracked the powdered skulls of "some o' them riddiclus dunkeys."

[End of Martin Conrad's Memorandum]

ONE HUNDRED AND NINTH CHAPTER

Another month passed, and then began the last and most important phase of my too changeful story.

Every week Martin had been coming and going between Ellan and London, occupied when he was away with the business of his next Expedition (for which Parliament had voted a large sum), and when he was at home with reports, diaries, charts, maps, and photographs toward a book he was writing about his last one.

As for myself, I had been (or tried to think I had been) entirely happy. With fresh air, new milk, a sweet bedroom, and above all, good and tender nursing (God bless Christian Ann for all she did for me!), my health had improved every day—or perhaps, by that heavenly hopefulness which goes with certain maladies, it had seemed to me to do so.

Yet mine was a sort of twilight happiness, nevertheless. Though the sun was always shining in my sky, it was frequently under eclipse. In spite of the sheltered life I lived in that home of charity and love, I was never entirely free from a certain indefinable uneasiness about my position.

I was always conscious, too, that Martin's mother and father, not to speak of Father Dan, were suffering from a similar feeling, for sometimes when we talked about the future their looks would answer to my thoughts, and it was just as if we were all silently waiting, waiting, waiting for some event that was to justify and rehabilitate me.

It came at last—for me with a startling suddenness.

One morning, nurse being out on an errand and Christian Ann patting her butter in the dairy, I was playing with baby on the rag-work hearthrug when our village newsman came to the threshold of the open door.

"Take a *Times*," he said. "You might as well be out of the world, ma'am, as not know what's going on in it."

I took one of his island newspapers, and after he had gone I casually glanced at it.

But what a shock it gave me! The first heading that flew in my face was—

"INSULAR DIVORCE BILL PASSED."

It was a report of the proceedings of the Supreme Court of our Ellan legislature, which (notwithstanding the opposition of its ecclesiastical members) had granted my husband's petition.

Perhaps I ought to have had a sense of immense relief. Or perhaps I should have gone down on my knees there and then, and thanked God that the miserable entanglement of the horrible marriage that had been forced upon me was at last at an end.

But no, I had only one feeling as the newspaper fell from my fingers—shame and humiliation, not for myself (for what did it matter about me, anyway?), but for Martin, whose name, now so famous, I had, through my husband's malice, been the means of dragging through the dust.

I remember that I thought I should never be able to look into my darling's face again, that when he came in the afternoon (as he always did) I should have to run away from him, and that all that was left to me was to hide myself and die.

But just as these wild thoughts were galloping through my brain I heard the sneck of the garden gate, and almost before I was aware of what else was happening Martin had come sweeping into the house like a rush of wind, thrown his arms around me, and covered my face, my neck, and my hands with kisses—never having done so before since I came to live at his mother's home.

"Such news! Such news!" he cried. "We are free, free, free!"

Then, seeing the newspaper at my feet on the floor, he said:

"Ah, I see you know already. I told them to keep everything away from you—all the miserable legal business. But no matter! It's over now. Of course it's shocking—perfectly shocking—that that squirming worm, after his gross infidelities, should have been able to do what he has done. But what matter about that either? He has done just what we wanted—what you couldn't do for yourself before I went away, your conscience forbidding you. The barrier that has divided us is down . . . now we can be married at any time."

I was so overcome by Martin's splendid courage, so afraid to believe fully that the boundless relief I had looked for so long had come to me at last, that for some time I could not speak. And when I did speak, though my heart was clamouring loud, I only said:

"But do you really think that . . . that we can now be husband and wife?"

"Think it?" he cried, with a peal of laughter. "I should think I do think it. What's to prevent us? Nothing! You've suffered enough, my poor girl. But all that you have gone through has to be forgotten, and you are never to look back again."

"Yes, yes, I know I should be happy, very happy," I said, "but what about you?"

"Me?"

"I looked forward to being a help—at least not a trouble to you, Martin."

"And so you will be. Why shouldn't you?"

"Martin," I said (I knew what I was doing, but I couldn't help doing it), "wouldn't it injure you to marry me . . . being what I am now . . . in the eyes of the world, I mean?"

He looked at me for a moment as if trying to catch my meaning, and then snatched me still closer to his breast.

"Mary," he cried, "don't ask me to consider what the damnable insincerities of society may say to a case like ours. If *you* don't care, then neither do I. And as for the world, by the Lord God I swear that all I ask of it I am now holding in my arms."

That conquered me—poor trembling hypocrite that I was, praying with all my soul that my objections would be overcome.

In another moment I had thrown my arms about my Martin's neck and kissed and kissed him, feeling for the first time after my months and years of fiery struggle that in the eyes of God and man I had a *right* to do so.

And oh dear, oh dear! When Martin had gone back to his work, what foolish rein I gave to my new-born rapture!

I picked baby up from the hearthrug and kissed her also, and then took her into the dairy to be kissed by her grandmother, who must have overheard what had passed between Martin and me, for I noticed that her voice had suddenly become livelier and at least an octave higher.

Then, baby being sleepy, I took her upstairs for her morning nap, and after leaning over her cradle, in the soft, damp, milk-like odour of her sweet body and breath, I stood up before the glass and looked at my own hot, tingling, blushing cheeks and sparkling eyes.

Oh, what gorgeous dreams of happiness came to me! I may have been the unmarried mother of a child, but my girlhood—my lost girlhood—was flowing back upon me. A vision of my marriage-day rose up before me and I saw myself as a bride, in my bridal veil and blossoms.

How happy I was going to be! But indeed I felt just then as if I had always been happy. It was almost as though some blessed stream of holy water had washed my memory clean of all the soilure of my recent days in London, for sure I am that if anybody had at that moment mentioned Ilford and the East End, the bricklayer and the Jew, or spoken of the maternity homes and the orphanages, I should have screamed.

Towards noon the old doctor came back from his morning rounds, and I noticed that *his* voice was pitched higher too. We never once spoke about the great news, the great event, while we sat at table; but I could not help noticing that we were all talking loud and fast and on the top of each other, as if some dark cloud which had hovered over our household had suddenly slid away.

After luncheon, nurse being back with baby, I went out for a walk alone, feeling wonderfully well and light, and having two hours to wait for Martin, who must be still pondering over his papers at the "Plough."

How beautiful was the day! How blue the sky! How bright the earth! How joyous the air—so sweet and so full of song-birds!

I remember that I thought life had been so good to me that I ought to be good to everybody else—especially to my father, from whom it seemed wrong for a daughter to be estranged, whatever he was and whatever he had done to her.

So I turned my face towards my poor grandmother's restored cottage on the curragh, fully determined to be reconciled to my father; and I only slackened my steps and gave up my purpose when I began to think of Nessy MacLeod and how difficult (perhaps impossible) it might be to reach him.

Even then I faced about for a moment to the Big House with some vain idea of making peace with Aunt Bridget and then slipping upstairs to my mother's room—having such a sense of joyous purity that I wished to breathe the sacred air my blessed saint had lived in.

But the end of it all was that I found myself on the steps of the Presbytery, feeling breathlessly happy, and telling myself, with a little access of pride in my own gratitude, that it was only right and proper that I should bring my happiness where I had so often brought my sorrow—to the dear priest who had been my friend since the day of my birth and my darling mother's friend before.

Poor old Father Dan! How good I was going to be to him!

ONE HUNDRED AND TENTH CHAPTER

A few minutes afterwards I was tripping upstairs (love and hope work wonderful miracles!) behind the Father's Irish housekeeper, Mrs. Cassidy, who was telling me how well I was looking ("smart and well extraordinary"), asking if it "was on my two feet I had walked all the way," and denouncing the "omathauns" who had been "after telling her there wasn't the width of a wall itself betune me and the churchyard."

I found Father Dan in his cosy study lined with books; and being so much wrapped up in my own impetuous happiness, I did not see at first that he was confused and nervous, or remember until next day that, though (at the sound of my voice from the landing) he cried "Come in, my child, come in," he was standing with his back to the door as I entered—

hiding something (it must have been a newspaper) under the loose seat of his easy-chair.

"Father," I said, "have you heard the news?"

"The news. . . ."

"I mean the news in the newspaper."

"Ah, the news in the newspaper."

"Isn't it glorious? That terrible marriage is over at last! Without my doing anything, either! Do you remember what you said the last time I came here?"

"The last time. . . ."

"You said that I, being a Catholic, could not break my marriage without breaking my faith. But my husband, being a Protestant, had no compunction. So it has come to the same thing in the end, you see. And now I'm free."

"You're free . . . free, are you?"

"It seems they have been keeping it all away from me—making no defence, I suppose—and it was only this morning I heard the news."

"Only this morning, was it?"

"I first saw it in a newspaper, but afterwards Martin himself came to tell me."

"Martin came, did he?"

"He doesn't care in the least; in fact, he is glad, and says we can be married at any time."

"Married at any time—he says that, does he?"

"Of course nothing is arranged yet, dear Father, but I couldn't help coming to see you about it. I want everything to be simple and quiet—no display of any kind."

"Simple and quiet, do you?"

"Early in the morning—immediately after mass, perhaps."

"Immediately after mass. . . ."

"Only a few wild flowers on the altar, and the dear homely souls who love me gathered around."

"The dear, homely souls. . . ."

"It will be a great, great thing for me, but I don't want to force myself upon anybody, or to triumph over any one—least of all over my poor father, now that he is so sick and down."

"No, no . . . now that he is so sick and down."

"I shall want *you* to marry us, Daddy Dan—not the Bishop or anybody else of that kind, you know."

"You'll want me to marry you—not the Bishop or anybody else of that kind."

"But Father Dan," I cried, laughing a little uneasily (for I had begun to realise that he was only repeating my own words), "why don't you say something for yourself?"

And then the cheery sunshine of the cosy room began to fade away.

Father Dan fumbled the silver cross which hung over his cassock (a sure sign of his nervousness), and said with a grave face and in a voice all a-tremble with emotion:

"My child. . . ."

"Yes?"

"You believe that I wouldn't pain or distress or shock you if I could avoid it?"

"Indeed I do."

"Yet I am going to pain and distress and shock you now. I . . . I cannot marry you to Martin Conrad. I daren't. The Church thinks that you are married already—that you are still the wife of your husband."

Though my dear priest had dealt me my death-blow, I had not yet begun to feel it, so I smiled up into his troubled old face and said:

"But how can the Church think that, dear Father? My husband has no rights over me now, and no duties or responsibilities with respect to me. He can marry again if he likes. And he will, I am sure he will, and nobody can prevent him. How, then, can the Church say that I am still his wife?"

"Because marriage, according to the law of the Church, can only be dissolved by death," said Father Dan. "Haven't I told you that before, my daughter? Didn't we go over it again and again when you were here the last time?"

"Yes, yes, but I thought if somebody else sought the divorce—somebody who had never believed in the indissolubility of marriage and wasn't bound by the law of the Church . . . we've heard of cases of that kind, haven't we?"

Father Dan shook his head.

"My poor child, no. The Church thinks marriage is a sacred covenant which no difference of belief, no sin on either side, can ever break."

"But, Father," I cried, "don't you see that the law has already broken it?"

"Only the civil law, my daughter. Remember the words of our blessed and holy Redeemer: '*Every one that putteth* *away his wife and marrieth another committeth adultery; and he that marrieth one that is put away committeth adultery.'* . . . My poor child, my heart bleeds for you, but isn't that the Divine Commandment?''

''Then you think,'' I said (the room was becoming dark and I could feel my lip trembling), ''you think that because I went through that marriage ceremony two years ago . . . and though the civil law has dissolved it . . . you think I am still bound by it, and will continue to be so . . . to the end of my life?''

Father Dan plucked at his cassock, fumbled his print handkerchief, and replied:

''I am sorry, my child, very, very sorry.''

''Father Dan,'' I said sharply, for by this time my heart was beginning to blaze, ''have you thought about Martin? Aren't you afraid that if our Church refuses to marry us he may ask some other church to do so?''

''Christ's words must be the final law for all true Christians, my daughter. And besides. . . .''

''Well?''

''Besides that. . . .''

''Yes?''

''It blisters my tongue to say it, my child, knowing your sufferings and great temptations, but. . . .''

''But what, dear Father?''

''You are in the position of the guilty party, and therefore no good clergyman of any Christian Church in the world, following the Commandment of his Master, would dare to marry you.''

What happened after that I cannot exactly say. I remember that, feeling the colour flying to my face, I flung up my hands to cover it, and that when I came to full possession of my senses again Father Dan (himself in a state of great agitation) was smoothing my arms and comforting me.

''Don't be angry with your old priest for telling you the truth—the bitter truth, my daughter.''

He had always seen this dark hour coming to him, and again and again he had prayed to be delivered from it—in the long nights of his fruitless wanderings when I was lost in London, and again since I had been found and had come home and he had looked on, with many a pang, at our silent hopes and expectations—Martin's and mine, we two children.

"And when you came into my little den to-day, my daughter, with a face as bright as stars and diamonds, God knows I would have given half of what is left of my life that mine should not be the hand to dash the cup of your happiness away."

As soon as I was sufficiently composed, within and without, Father Dan led me downstairs (praying God and His Holy Mother to strengthen me on my solitary way), and then stood at the door in his cassock to watch me while I walked up the road.

It was hardly more than half an hour since I had passed over the ground before, yet in that short time the world seemed to have become pale and grey—the sun gone out, the earth grown dark, the still air joyless, nothing left but the everlasting heavens and the heavy song of the sea.

As I approached the doctor's house Martin came swinging down the road to meet me, with his strong free step and that suggestion of the wind from the mountain-tops which seemed to be always about him.

"Hello!" he cried. "Thought you were lost and been hunting all over the place for you."

But as he came nearer and saw how white and wan my face was, though I was doing my best to smile, he stopped and said:

"My poor little woman, where have you been, and what have they been doing to you?"

And then, as well as I could, I told him.

ONE HUNDRED AND ELEVENTH CHAPTER

"It's all my fault," he said.

He had led me to the garden-house, which stood among the bluebells at the end of the orchard, and was striding to and fro in front of it.

"I knew perfectly what the attitude of the Church would be, and I ought to have warned you."

I had never before seen him so excited. There was a wild look in his eyes and his voice was quivering like the string of a bow.

"Poor old Father Dan! He's an old angel, with as good a heart as ever beat under a cassock. But what a slave a man may be to the fetish of his faith! Only think what he says, my darling! The guilty party! I'll never believe you *are* the guilty party, but consider! The guilty party may never marry! No good clergyman of any Christian Church in the world dare marry her! What an infamy! Ask yourself what the churches are here for. Aren't they here to bring salvation to the worst of sinners? Yet they cast out the woman who has sinned against her marriage vow—denying her access to the altar and turning her out of doors—though she may have repented a thousand times, with bitter, bitter tears!"

He walked two or three paces in front of the garden-house and then came back to me with flaming eyes.

"But that's not your case, anyway," he said. "Father Dan knows perfectly that your marriage was no marriage at all—only a sordid bit of commercial bargaining, in which your husband gave you his bad name for your father's unclean money. It was no marriage in any other sense either, and might have been annulled if there had been any common honesty in annulment. And now that it has tumbled to wreck and ruin, as anybody might have seen it would do, you are told that you are bound to it to the last day and hour of your life! After all you have gone through—all you have suffered—never to know another hour of happiness as long as you live! While your husband, notwithstanding his brutalities and infidelities, is free to do what he likes, to marry whom he pleases! How stupid! How disgusting! How damnable!"

His passionate voice was breaking, he could scarcely control it.

"Oh, I know what they'll say. It will be the old, old song, 'Whom God hath joined together.' That's what this old Church of ours has been saying for centuries to poor women with broken hearts. Has the Church itself got a heart to break? No—nothing but its cast-iron laws which have been broken a thousand times and nobody a penny the worse."

"But I wonder," he continued, "I wonder why these churchmen, who would talk about the impossibility of putting asunder those whom God has joined together, don't begin by asking themselves how and when and where God joins them. Is it in church, when they stand before the altar and are asked a few questions, and give a few answers? If so, then God is responsible for some of the most shocking transactions that ever disgraced humanity—all the pride and vanity and deliberate concubinage that have covered themselves in every age, and are covering themselves still, with the cloak of marriage.''

''But no,'' said Martin, ''it's not in churches that God marries people. They've got to be married before they go there, or they are never married at all—never! They've got to be married in their *hearts*, for that's where God joins people together, not in churches and before priests and altars.''

I sat listening to him with a rising and throbbing heart, and after another moment he stepped into the garden-house, and sat beside me.

''Mary,'' he said, in his passionate voice, ''that's our case, isn't it? God married us from the very first. There has never been any other woman for me, and there never has been any other man for you—isn't that so, my darling? . . . Then what are they talking about—these churches and churchmen? It's *they* who are the real divorcers—trying to put those asunder whom God Himself has joined together. That's the plain sense of the matter, isn't it?''

I was trembling with fear and expectation. Perhaps it was the same with me as it had been before; perhaps I wanted (now more than ever) to believe what Martin was saying; perhaps I did not know enough to be able to answer him; perhaps my overpowering love and the position I stood in compelled me to agree. But I could not help it if it seemed to me that his clear mind—clear as a mountain river and as swift and strong—was sweeping away all the worn-out sophistries.

''Then what . . . what are we to do?'' I asked him.

''Do? Our duty to ourselves, my darling, that's what we have to do. If we cannot be married according to the law of the Church, we must be married according to the law of the land. Isn't that enough? This is our own affair, dearest, ours and nobody else's. It's only a witness we want anyway—a witness before God and man that we intend to be man and wife in future.''

''But Father Dan?''

''Leave him to me,'' said Martin. ''I'll tell him everything. But come into the house now. You are catching a cold. Unless we take care they'll kill you before they've done.''

Next day he leaned over the back of my chair as I sat in the *chiollagh* with baby in my lap, and said, in a low tone:

"I've seen Father Dan."

"Well?"

"The old angel took it badly. 'God forbid that you should do that same, my boy,' he said, 'putting both yourself and that sweet child of mine out of the Church for ever.' 'It's the Church that's putting us out,' I told him. 'But God's holy law condemns it, my son,' he said. 'God's law is love; and He has no other law,' I answered."

I was relieved and yet nervous, glad and yet afraid.

A week passed, and then the time came for Martin to go to Windsor for his investiture. There had been great excitement in Sunny Lodge in preparation for this event, but being a little unwell I had been out of the range of it.

At the moment of Martin's departure I was in bed, and he had come upstairs to say good-bye to me.

What had been happening in the meantime I hardly knew, but I had gathered that he thought pressure would be brought to bear on me.

"Our good old Church is like a limpet on the shore," he said. "Once it gets its suckers down it doesn't let go in a hurry. But sit tight, little woman. Don't yield an inch while I'm away," he whispered.

When he left me I reached up to see him going down the road to the railway station. His old father was walking proudly by his side, bare-headed as usual and still as blithe as a boy.

Next day I was startled by an unexpected telegram. It came from a convent in Lancashire and was addressed to "Mary O'Neill, care of Doctor Conrad." It ran:

"Am making a round of visits to the houses of our Society and would like to see you on my way to Ireland. May I cross to-morrow? Mother Magdalene."

ONE HUNDRED AND TWELFTH CHAPTER

She arrived the following afternoon—my dear Reverend Mother with the pale spiritual face and saint-like eyes.

Except that her habit was now blue and white instead of black, she seemed hardly changed in any respect since our days at the Sacred Heart.

Finding that I was in bed, she put up at the "Plough" and came every day to nurse me.

I was naturally agitated at seeing her again after so many years and such various experiences, being uncertain how much she knew of them.

Remembering Martin's warning, I was also fairly certain that she had been sent for, but my uneasiness on both heads soon wore off.

Her noiseless step, her soft voice, and her sweet smile soothed and comforted me. I began to feel afresh the influence she had exercised over me when I was a child, and to wonder why, during my dark time in London, I had never thought of writing to her.

During the first days of her visit she said nothing about painful things—never mentioning my marriage, or what had happened since she saw me last.

Her talk was generally about our old school and my old schoolfellows, many of whom came to the convent for her "retreats," which were under the spiritual direction of one of the Pope's domestic prelates.

Sometimes she would laugh about our Mother of the Novices who had "become old and naggledy"; sometimes about the little fat Maestro of the Pope's choir who had cried when I first sang the hymn to the Virgin, ("Go on, little angel,"); and sometimes about the two old lay sisters (now quite toothless) who still said I might have been a "wonderful washerwoman" if I had "put my mind to it."

I hate to think that my dear Reverend Mother was doing this consciously in order to break down my defences, but the effect was the same. Little by little, during the few days she was with me, she bridged the space back to my happy girlhood, for insensibly I found myself stirred by the emotions of the convent, and breathing again the air of my beloved Rome.

On the afternoon of the fourth day of her visit I was sitting up by her side in front of my window, which was wide open. It was just such a peaceful evening as our last one at Nemi. Not a leaf was stirring; not a breath of wind in the air; the only sounds we heard were the lowing of the cattle waiting to be milked, the soft murmur of the sea, and the jolting of a springless cart that was coming up from the shore, laden with sea wrack.

As the sun began to sink it lit blazing fires in the windows of the village in front—especially in the window of my mother's room, which was just visible over the tops of the apple trees in the orchard.

The Reverend Mother talked of Benediction. If she were in Rome she would be in church singing the *Ora pro nobis.*

"Let us sing it now. Shall we?" she said.

At the next moment her deep majestic contralto, accompanied by my own thin and quavering soprano, were sending out into the silent air the holy notes which to me are like the reverberations of eternity:

> "*Mater purissima*
> *Ora pro nobis.*
> *Mater castissima*
> *Ora pro nobis.*"

When we had finished I found my hand lying in her lap. Patting it gently she said:

"Mary, I am leaving you to-morrow."

"So soon?"

"Yes, but I can't go without telling you why I came"—and then her mission was revealed to me.

She had heard about my marriage and the ruin it had fallen to; my disappearance from home and the circumstances of my recovery; my husband's petition for divorce and the disclosures that had followed it.

But sad and serious and even tragic as all this might be, it was as nothing (in the eyes of the Church and of God) compared with the awful gravity of the step I now contemplated—a second marriage while my husband was still alive.

She had nothing to say against Martin. Except the facts that concerned myself she had never heard a word to his discredit. She could even understand those facts, though she could not condone them. Perhaps he had seen my position (married to a cruel and unfaithful husband) and his pity had developed into love—she had heard of such happenings.

"But only think, my child, what an abyss he is driving you to! He asks you to break your marriage vows! . . . Oh, yes, yes, I can see what he will say—that pressure was put upon you and you were too young to know what you were doing. That may be true, but it isn't everything. I thought it wrong, cruelly wrong, that your father should choose a husband for you without regard to your wish and will. But it was you, not your father, who made your marriage vows, and you can never get away from that—never!"

Those marriage vows were sacred; our blessed Saviour had said they could never be broken, and our holy Church had taken His Commandment for law.

"Think, my child, only think what would happen to the world if every woman who has made an unhappy marriage were to do as you think of doing. What a chaos! What an uprooting of all the sacred ties of home and family! And how women would suffer—women and children above all. Don't you see that, my daughter?"

The security of society lay in the sanctity of marriage; the sanctity of marriage lay in its indissolubility; and its indissolubility centred in the fact that God was a party to it.

"Perhaps you are told that your marriage will be your own concern only and that God and the Church have nothing to do with it. But if women had believed that in all ages, how different the world would be to-day! Oh, believe me, your marriage vow is sacred, and you cannot break it without sin—mortal sin, my daughter."

The moral of all this was that I must renounce Martin Conrad, wash my heart clean of my love of him, shun the temptation of seeing him again, and if possible forget him altogether.

"It will be hard. I know it will be hard, but . . ."

"It will be quite impossible," I said as well as I could, for my very lips were trembling.

I had been shaken to the depths of my soul by what the Reverend Mother said, but remembering Martin's warning I now struggled to resist her.

"Two years ago, while I was living with my husband I tried to do that and I couldn't," I said. "And if I couldn't do it then, when the legal barrier stood between us, how can I do it now when the barrier is gone?"

After that I told her of all I had passed through since as a result of my love for Martin—how I had parted from him when he went down to the Antarctic; how I had waited for him in London; how I had sacrificed family and friends and home, and taken up poverty and loneliness and hard work for him; how I had fallen into fathomless depths of despair when I thought I had lost him; and how joy and happiness had returned only when God, in His gracious goodness, had given him back.

"No, no, no," I cried. "My love for Martin can never be overcome or forgotten—never as long as I live in the world!"

"Then," said the Reverend Mother (she had been listening intently with her great eyes fixed on my hot and tingling face), "then," she said, in her grave and solemn voice, "if that is the case, my child, there is only one thing for you to do—to leave it."

"Leave it?"

"Leave the world, I mean. Return with me to Rome and enter the convent."

It would be impossible to say how this affected me—how it shook me to the heart's core—how, in spite of my efforts to act on my darling's warning, it seemed to penetrate to the inmost part of my being and to waken some slumbering instinct in my soul.

For a long time I sat without speaking again, only listening with a fluttering heart to what the Reverend Mother was saying—that it was one of the objects of the religious life to offer refuge to the tortured soul that could not trust itself to resist temptation; and that taking my vows as a nun to God would be the only way (known to and acknowledged by the Church) of cancelling my vows as a wife to my husband.

"You will be a bride still, my child, but a bride of Christ. And isn't that better—far better? You used to wish to be a nun, you know, and if your father had not come for you on that most unhappy errand you might have been one of ourselves already. Think of it, my child. The Mothers of our convent will be glad to welcome you, if you can come as a willing and contented Sister. And how can I leave you here, at the peril of your soul, my daughter?"

I was deeply moved, but I made one more effort.

I told the Reverend Mother that, since the days when I had wished to be a nun, a great change had come over me. I had become a woman, with all a woman's passions—the hunger and thirst for love, human love, the love of the good man who loved me with all his soul and strength. Therefore I could never be a willing and contented Sister. I should only break the peace and harmony of their house. And though she were to put me down in the lowest cell of her convent, my love would follow me there; it would interrupt my offices, it would clamour through my prayers, and I should always be unhappy—miserably unhappy.

"Not so unhappy there as you will be if you remain in the world and carry out your intention," said the Reverend Mother. "Oh believe me, my child, I know you better than you know yourself. If you marry again, you will never be able to forget that you have broken your vow. Other women may forget it—frivolous women—women living in society and devoting their lives to selfish pleasures. Such women may divorce their husbands, or be divorced by them, and then marry again, without remembering that they are living in a state of sin, whatever the civil law may say—open and wicked and shameless sin. But *you* will remember it, and it will make you more unhappy than you have ever been in your life before.''

''Worse than that,'' she continued, after a moment, ''it will make your husband unhappy also. He will see your remorse, and share it, because he will know he has been the cause. If he is a good man the mere sight of your grief will torture him. The better man he is the more will he suffer. If you were a runaway nun he would wish to take you back to your convent, for though it might tear his heart out to part with you, he would want to restore your soul. But being a wife who has broken her marriage vows he will never be able to do anything. An immense and awful shadow will stand between you and darken every hour of your lives that is left.''

When the Reverend Mother had done I sat motionless and speechless, with an aching and suffocating heart, staring down on the garden over which the night was falling.

After a while she patted my cold hand and got up to go, saying she would call early in the morning to bid me good-bye. Her visit to Ireland would not last longer than three weeks, and after that she might come back for me, if I felt on reflection (she was sure I should) that I ought to return with her to Rome.

I did not reply. Perhaps it was partly because I was physically weak that my darling's warning was so nearly overcome. But the moment the door closed on the Reverend Mother a conviction of the truth of what she had said rushed upon me like the waves of an overflowing sea.

Yet how cruel! After all our waiting, all our longing, all our gorgeous day-dreams of future happiness! When I was going to be a bride, a happy bride, with my lost and stolen girlhood coming back to me!

For the second time a dark and frowning mountain had risen between Martin and me. Formerly it had been my marriage—now it was my God.

But if God forbade my marriage with Martin what was I to do? What was left in life for me? Was there anything left?

I was sitting with both hands over my face, asking myself these questions and struggling with a rising tempest of tears, when I heard baby crying in the room below, and Christian Ann hushing and comforting her.

"What's doing on the *boght*, I wonder?"

A few minutes later they came upstairs, Isabel on her grandmother's arm, in her nightdress, ready for bed.

"If it isn't the wind I don't know in the world what's doing on the *millish*," said the old lady.

And then baby smiled through the big round beads that stood in her sea-blue eyes and held out her arms to me.

Oh God! Oh God! Was not *this* my answer?

ONE HUNDRED AND THIRTEENTH CHAPTER

In her different way Christian Ann had arrived at the same conclusion.

Long before the thought came to me she had conceived the idea that Father Dan and the Reverend Mother were conspiring to carry me off, and in her dear sweet womanly jealousy (not to speak of higher and nobler instincts) she had resented this intensely.

For four days she had smothered her wrath, only revealing it to baby in half-articulate interviews over the cradle ("We're no women for these nun bodies, going about the house like ghosts, are we, *villish?*"), but on the fifth day it burst into the fiercest flame and the gentle old thing flung out at everybody.

That was the morning of the departure of the Reverend Mother, who, after saying good-bye to me in my bedroom, had just returned to the parlour-kitchen, where Father Dan was waiting to take her to the railway station.

What provoked Christian Ann's outburst I never rightly knew, for though the door to the staircase was open, and I could generally catch anything that was said in the room below (through the open timbers of the unceiled floor), the soft voice of the Reverend Mother never reached me, and the Irish roll of Father Dan's vowels only rumbled up like the sound of a drum.

But Christian Ann's words came sharp and clear as the crack of a breaker, sometimes trembling with indignation, sometimes quivering with emotion, and at last thickening into sobs.

"Begging your pardon, ma'am, may I ask what is that you're saying to the Father about Mary O'Neill? . . . Going back to Rome is she? To the convent, eh? . . . No, ma'am, that she never will! Not if I know her, ma'am. . . . Not for any purpose in the world, ma'am. . . . Temptation, you say? You know best, ma'am, but I don't call it overcoming temptation—going into hidlands to get out of the way of it. . . . Yes, I'm a Christian woman and a good Catholic too, please the Saints, but asking your pardon, ma'am, I'm not thinking too much of your convents, or believing the women inside of them are living such very unselfish lives either, ma'am."

Another soft rumble as of a drum, and then—

"No, ma'am, no, that's truth enough, ma'am. I've never been a nun myself, having had better work to do in the world, ma'am. But it's all as one—I know what's going on in the convents, I'm thinking. . . . Harmony and peace, you say? Yes, and jealousy and envy sometimes, too, or you wouldn't be women like the rest of us, ma'am. . . . As for Mary O'Neill, *she* has something better to do too, I'm thinking. . . . After doing wrong, is she? Maybe she is, the *boght millish,* maybe we all are, ma'am, and have need of God's mercy and forgiveness. But I never heard that praying is the only kind of penance He asks of us, ma'am. And if it is, I wouldn't trust but there are poor women who are praying as well when they're working over their wash-tubs as some ones when they're saying their rosaries and singing their Tantum Ergos. . . ."

Another interruption and then—"There's Bella Kinnish herself who keeps the corner shop, ma'am. Her husband was lost at the 'mackerel' two years for Easter. He left her with three little children and a baby unborn, and Bella's finding it middling hard to get a taste of butcher's meat, or even a bit of loaf-bread itself for them, ma'am. And when she's sitting late at night, as the doctor's telling me, and all the rest of the village dark, darning little Liza's stockings, and patching little Willie's coat, or maybe nursing the baby when it's down with the measles, the Lord is as pleased with her, I'm thinking, as with some of your nun bodies in their grand blue cloaks taking turn and turn to kneel before the tabernacle."

There was another rumble of apologetic voices after that (both Father Dan's and the Reverend Mother's), and then came Christian Ann's clear notes again, breaking fast, though, and sometimes threatening to stop.

"What's that you're saying, ma'am? . . . Motherhood a sacred and holy state also? 'Deed it is, ma'am! That's truth enough too, though some ones who shut themselves up in convents don't seem to think so. . . . A mother's a mother, and what's more, her child is her child, wedlock or no wedlock. And if she's doing right by her little one, and bringing it up well, and teaching it true, I don't know that when her time comes the Lord will be asking her which side of her wedding-day it was born on. . . .

"As for Mary O'Neill, ma'am, when you're talking and talking about her saving her soul, you're forgetting she has her child to save too, ma'am. God gave her the *boght villish,* and is she to run away from it? It's a fine blessing would be on her for that, isn't it? . . . Father Dan, I'm surprised at you—such a terrible, cruel, shocking, unnatural thing as you're thinking. I thought you were a better man than that—I really did. . . . And as for some ones that call themselves Mothers, they're no mothers at all and never will be—tempting a poor woman in her trouble to leave her child to be a charge on other people. . . ."

Still another rumble of soft voices and then—

"Not that I'm thinking of myself, ma'am. Dear heart, no! It's only too eager I'd be to have the lil angel to myself. There she is on the hearthrug, ma'am, and if anything happens to Mary O'Neill, it's there she'll be for the rest of *my* life, and it's sorry I am for the darling's sake that my time cannot be longer. . . .

"But Mary O'Neill isn't for leaving her little one to go into any convent. 'Deed no, ma'am! There would be no rest on her if she did. I'm a mother myself and I know what she'd be feeling. You might put the black hood on her head, but Nature's a wonderful powerful thing, and she'd never go to bed at night or get up in the morning without thinking of her baby. 'Where's she now?' she'd be asking herself. 'What's happening to my motherless child?' she'd be saying. And as the years went on she'd be thinking, 'Is she well, and has she taken her first communion, and is she growing up a good woman, and what's the world doing on her?' . . .

"No, ma'am, no! Mary O'Neill will go into no convent while her child is here to be cared for! 'Deed she won't! Not Mary O'Neill! I'll never believe it of her! Never in this world!"

I heard nothing more for a long time after that—nothing but a noise in my own head which drowned all other noises. And when I recovered my composure the Reverend Mother and Father Dan must have gone, for there was no sound in the room below except that of the rocking-chair (which was going rapidly) and Christian Ann's voice, fierce but broken as if baby had cried and she was comforting her.

Then a great new spirit came to me. It was Motherhood again! The mighty passion of motherhood—which another mighty passion had temporarily overlaid—sweeping down on me once more out of the big, simple, child-like heart of my Martin's mother.

In the fever of body and brain at that moment it seemed to solve all the problems of life for me.

If the Commandment of God forbade me to marry again because I had already taken vows before the altar (no matter how innocently or under what constraint), and if I had committed a sin, a great sin, and baby was the living sign of it, there was only one thing left me to do—to remain as I was and consecrate the rest of my life to my child.

That would be the real expiation, not burying myself in a convent. To live for my child! Alone with her! Here, where my sin had been, to work out my atonement!

This pleased and stirred and uplifted me very much when I first thought of it. And even when I remembered Martin, and thought how hard it would be to tear myself away from the love which waited with open arms for me (so near, so sweet, so precious), there seemed to be something majestic, almost sublime, in the sacrifice I was about to make—the sacrifice of everything in the world (except one thing) that was dearer to me than life itself.

A sort of spiritual pride came with the thought of this sacrifice. I saw myself as a woman who, having pledged herself to God in her marriage and sinned against the law in breaking her marriage vows, was now going to accept her fate and to humble herself before the bar of Eternal Justice.

But oh, what a weak, vain thing I was, just when I thought I was so strong and noble!

After a long day in which I had been fighting back the pains of my poor torn heart and almost persuading myself that I had won a victory, a letter came by the evening post which turned all my great plans to dust and ashes.

The letter was from Martin. Only four little pages, written in my darling's rugged hand, half serious and half playful, yet they made the earth rock and reel beneath me.

"My Dear Little Woman,—*Just back from Windsor. Stunning 'do.' Tell you all about it when I get back home. Meantime up to my eyes in work. Arrangements for next Expedition going ahead splendidly. Had a meeting of the committee yesterday and settled to sail by the 'Orient' third week in August, so as to get down to Winter Quarters in time to start south in October.*

"*Our own little affair has got to come off first, though, so I'll see the High Bailiff as soon as I return.*

"*And what do you think, my 'chree'? The boys of the 'Scotia' are all coming over to Ellan for the great event. 'Deed, yes, though, every man-jack of them! Scientific staff included, not to speak of O'Sullivan and old Treacle—who swears you blew a kiss to him. They remember you coming down to Tilbury. Aw, God bless me soul, gel, the way they're talking of you! There's no holding them at all at all!*

"*Seriously, darling, you have no time to lose in making your preparations. My plan is to take you to New Zealand and leave you at Wellington (good little town, good people, too) while I make my bit of a trip to the Pole.*

"*We'll arrange about Girlie when I reach home, which will be next week, I hope—or rather fear—for every day is like a month when I'm away from you.*

"*But never mind, little woman! Once I get this big Expedition over we are not going to be separated any more. Not for a single day as long as we live, dearest! No, by the Lord God—life's too short for it.*

"Mart."

ONE HUNDRED AND FOURTEENTH CHAPTER

After I had read this letter I saw that my great battle, which I had supposed to be over, was hardly begun.

Martin was coming home with his big heart full of love for me, and my own heart ran out to meet him.

He intended to sail for New Zealand the second week in August, and he expected to take me with him.

In spite of all my religious fears and misgivings, I asked myself why I should not go? What was to prevent me? What sin had I really committed? What was there for reparation? Was it anything more than the letter of the Divine law that I had defied and broken?

My love was mine and I was his, and I belonged to him for ever. He was going out on a great errand in the service of humanity. Couldn't I go to be his partner and helpmate? And if there *had* been sin, if the law of God *had* been broken, wouldn't that, too, be a great atonement?

Thus my heart fought with my soul, or with my instincts as a child of the Church, or whatever else it was that brought me back and back, again and again, in spite of all the struggles of my love, to the firm Commandment of our Lord.

Father Dan had been right—I could not get away from that. The Reverend Mother had been right, too—other women might forget that they had broken the Divine law but I never should. If I married Martin and went away with him, I should always be thinking of the falseness of my position, and that would make me unhappy. It would also make Martin unhappy to witness my unhappiness, and that would be the worst bitterness life could bring.

Then what was left to me? If it was impossible that I should bury myself in a convent it was equally impossible that I should live alone, and Martin in the same world with me.

Not all the spiritual pride I could conjure up in the majesty and solemnity of my self-sacrifice could conquer the yearning of my heart as a woman. Not all my religious fervour could keep me away from Martin. In spite of my conscience, sooner or later I should go to him—I knew quite well I should. And my child, instead of being a barrier dividing us, would be a natural bond calling on us and compelling us to come together.

Then what was left to a woman in my position who believed in the Divine Commandment—who could not get away from it? Were all the doors of life locked to her? Turn which way she would, was there no way out?

Darker and darker every day became this question, but light came at last, a kind of light or the promise of light. It was terrible, and yet it brought me, oh, such immense relief!

I am almost afraid to speak of it, so weak and feeble must any words be in which I attempt to describe that unforgetable change. Already I had met some of the mysteries of a woman's life—now I was to meet the last, the greatest, the most tragic, and yet the kindest of them all.

I suppose the strain of emotion I had been going through had been too much for my physical strength, for three days after the arrival of Martin's letter I seemed to be really ill.

I am ashamed to dwell on my symptoms, but for a moment I am forced to do so. My eyes were bright, my cheeks were coloured, and there was no outward indication of any serious malady. But towards evening I always had a temperature, and in the middle of the night (I was sleeping badly) it rose very high, with a rapid pulse and anxious breathing, and in the morning there was great exhaustion.

Old Doctor Conrad, who had been coming to me twice a day, began to look very grave. At last, after a short examination, he said, rather nervously:

"I should like a colleague from Blackwater to consult with me. Will you receive him?"

I said "Yes" on one condition—that if the new doctor had anything serious to say he should report it first to me.

A little reluctantly Martin's father agreed to my terms and the consulting physician was sent for. He came early the next day—a beautiful Ellan morning with a light breeze from the sea bringing the smell of new-mown hay from the meadows lying between.

He was an elderly man, and I could not help seeing a shadow cross his clean-shaven face the moment his eyes first fell on me. They were those tender but searching eyes which are so often seen in doctors, who are always walking through the Valley of the Shadow and seem to focus their gaze accordingly.

Controlling his expression, he came up to my bed and, taking the hand I held out to him, he said:

"I trust we'll not frighten you, my lady."

I liked that (though I cared nothing about my lost title, I thought it was nice of him to remember it), and said I hoped I should not be too restless.

While he took out and fixed his stethoscope (he had such beautiful soft hands) he told me that he had had a daughter of my own age once.

"Once? Where is she now?" I asked him.

"In the Kingdom. She died like a Saint," he answered.

Then he made a long examination (returning repeatedly to the same place), and when it was over and he raised his face I thought it looked still more serious.

"My child," he said (I liked that too), "you've never spared yourself, have you?"

I admitted that I had not.

"When you've had anything to do you've done it, whatever it might cost you."

I admitted that also. He looked round to see if there was anybody else in the room (there was only the old doctor, who was leaning over the end of the bed, watching the face of his colleague) and then said, in a low voice:

"Has it ever happened that you have suffered from privation and hard work and loss of sleep and bad lodgings and . . . and exposure?"

His great searching eyes seemed to be looking straight into my soul, and I could not have lied to him if I had wished, so I told him a little (just a little) about my life in London—at Bayswater, in the East End and Ilford.

"And did you get wet sometimes, very wet, through all your clothes?" he asked me.

I told him No, but suddenly remembering that during the cold days after baby came (when I could not afford a fire) I had dried her napkins on my body, I felt that I could not keep that fact from him.

"You dried baby's napkins on your own body?" he asked.

"Sometimes I did. Just for a while," I answered, feeling a little ashamed, and my tears rising.

"Ah!" he said, and then turning to the old doctor, "What a mother will do for her child, Conrad!"

The eyes of Doctor Conrad (which seemed to have become swollen) were still fixed on the face of his colleague, and, speaking as if he had forgotten that I was present with them in the room, he said:

"You think she's very ill, don't you?"

"We'll talk of that in your consulting-room," said the strange doctor.

Then, telling me to lie quiet and they would come back presently, he went downstairs and Martin's father followed him.

Nurse came up while they were away (she had taken possession of me during the last few days), and I asked her who were in the parlour-kitchen.

"Only Father Donovan and Mrs. Conrad—and baby," she told me.

Then the doctors came back—the consultant first, trying to look cheerful, and the old doctor last, with a slow step and his head down, as if he had been a prisoner coming back to court to receive sentence.

"My lady," said the strange doctor, "you are a brave woman if ever there was one, so we have decided to tell you the truth about your condition."

And then he told me.

I was not afraid. I will not say that I was not sorry. I could have wished to live a little longer—especially now when (but for the Commandment of God) love and happiness seemed to be within my grasp.

But oh, the relief! There was something sacred in it, something supernatural. It was as if God Himself had come down to me in the bewildering maze that was haunted by the footsteps of my fate and led me out of it.

Yet why these poor weak words? They can mean so little to anybody except a woman who has been what I was, and she can have no need of them.

All fear had vanished from my thoughts. I had no fear for myself, I remembered, and none for baby. The only regret I felt was for Martin—he loved me so; there had never been any other woman in the world for him.

After a moment I thanked the doctors and hoped I had not given them too much trouble. Doctor Conrad seemed crushed into stupefaction and said nothing; but the strange doctor tried to comfort me by saying there would be no pain, and that my malady was of a kind that would probably make no outward manifestation.

Being a woman to the end I was very glad of that, and then I asked him if it would last long. He said No, not long, he feared, although everything was in God's hands and nobody could say certainly.

I was saying I was glad of that too, when my quick ears caught a sound of crying. It was Christian Ann, and Father Dan was hushing her. I knew what was happening—the good souls were listening at the bottom of the stairs.

My first impulse was to send nurse to say they were not to cry. Then I had half a mind to laugh, so that they might hear me and know that what I was going through was nothing. But finally I bethought me of Martin, and asked that they might both be brought up, for I had something to say to them.

After a moment they came into the room, Christian Ann in her simple pure dress, and Father Dan in his shabby sack coat, both looking very sorrowful, the sweet old children.

Then (my two dear friends standing together at the foot of the bed) I told them what the doctor had said, and warned them that they were to tell nobody else—nobody whatever. especially Martin.

"Leave *me* to tell *him*," I said. "Do you faithfully promise me?"

I could see how difficult it was for them to keep back their tears, but they gave me their word and that was all I wanted.

"My boy! My poor boy *veen!* He's thinking there isn't another woman in the world like her," said Christian Ann.

And then Father Dan said something about my mother extracting the same promise concerning myself, when I was a child at school.

After that the Blackwater doctor stepped up to say good-bye.

"I leave you in good hands, but you must let me come to see you again some day," he said, and then with a playful smile he added:

"They've got lots of angels up in heaven—we must try to keep some of them on earth, you know."

That was on the fifth of July, old Midsummer Day, which is our national day in Ellan, and flags were flying over many of the houses in the village.

ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTEENTH CHAPTER

JULY 6. I feel so much better to-day. I hardly know what reaction of my whole being, physical and spiritual, has set in since yesterday, but my heart is lighter than for a long time, and sleep, which I had come to look upon as a lost blessing, came to me last night for four solid hours—beautiful and untroubled as a child's.

JULY 8. Martin writes that he expects to be here on the 12th. Letter full of joyous spirits. "Lots to tell you when I reach home, dearest." Strange! No mortal can imagine how anxious I am to get him back, yet I almost dread his coming. When he was away before, Time could not go fast enough for me. Now it is going too fast. I know what that means—the story I have to tell. How am I to tell it?

JULY 10. Only two days more and Martin will be here. Of course I must be up when he arrives. Nurse says No, but I say Yes. To be in bed when he comes would be too much of a shock for him.

"Servants are such domineering tyrants," says Christian Ann, who never had but one, and "the strange woman" was such a phantom in the house that the poor mistress was grateful to God when Hollantide came round and the ghost walked away of itself. My nurse is a dear, though. How glad I am now that I persuaded Christian Ann to let her stay.

JULY 12. Martin comes to-day, and the old doctor (with such a proud and stately step) has gone off to Blackwater to meet him. I am terribly weak (no pain whatever), but perfectly resolute on dressing and going downstairs towards tea-time. I shall wear a white tea-gown, which Sister Mildred gave me in London. Martin likes me best in white.

LATER. My Martin has come! We had counted it up that travelling across the island by motor-car he would arrive at five, so I was dressed and downstairs by four, sitting in the *chiollagh* and watching the road through the window opposite. But he was half an hour late, and Christian Ann and I were in such a fever that anybody would have believed it to be half a century and that the world had stood still.

We might have known what would happen. At Blackwater "the boys" (the same that "got up the spree" when Martin went away) had insisted on a demonstration. Then, on reaching our village, Martin had got down and shaken hands with everybody—the joiner and the grocer and the blacksmith and the widow who keeps the corner shop—so that it had taken him a quarter of an hour to get through, amid a general chorus of "The boy he is, though!" and "No pride at all at all!"

After that he drove home at top speed, and my quick ears caught the musical hum of the motor as it crossed the bridge. Good gracious, what excitement!

"Quick nurse, help me to the gate."

I got there just in time to hear a shout, and to see a precipitate bound out of the car and then . . . what an embrace!

It is such a good thing my Martin is a big, brawny person, for I don't know how I should have got back to the house, being so weak and breathless just then, if his strong arm had not been round my waist.

Dr. O'Sullivan had come too, looking as gay as a humming-bird, and after I had finished with Martin I kissed him also (having such a largesse of affection to distribute generally), whereupon he blushed like a boy, bless him, and stammered out something about St. Patrick and St. Thomas, and how he wouldn't have believed anybody who had said there was anything so sweet, etc.

Martin said I was looking so well, and he, too, declared he wouldn't have believed any man who had sworn I could have looked so much better in the time.

My nervous thermometer must have gone up by leaps and bounds during the next hour, for immediately after tea the old doctor ordered me back to bed, though I refused to go until he had faithfully promised that the door to the staircase should be kept open, so that I could hear what was said downstairs.

What lots of fun they had there! Half the parish must have come in "to put a sight" on Martin after his investiture, including old Tommy the Mate, who told everybody over and over again that he had "known the lad since he was a lump" and "him and me are same as brothers."

The old doctor's stately pride must have been something to see. It was "Sir Martin" here and "Sir Martin" there, until I could have cried to hear him. I felt just as foolish myself, too, for though I cannot remember that my pulse gave one extra beat when they made me "your ladyship," now that Martin has become. . . . But that's what we women are, you see!

At length Martin's big voice came up clear above the rest, and then the talk was about the visit to Windsor. Christian Ann wanted to know if he wasn't "freckened" to be there, "not being used of Kings," whereupon he cried:

"What! Frightened of another man—and a stunning good one, too!"

And then came a story of how the King had asked if he hadn't been in fear of icebergs, and how he had answered No, you could strike more of them in a day in London (meaning icy-hearted people) than in a life-time in the Antarctic.

I suppose I must have laughed at that, for the next I heard was:

"Hush! Isn't that Mary?"

"Aw, yes, the poor *veg veen,*" said a sad voice. It was Christian Ann's. At the bottom of her heart I shall always be the child who "sang carvals to her door."

What a wonderful day! I shall not sleep a wink to-night, though. To-morrow I must tell him.

JULY 13. I intended to tell Martin this morning, but I really couldn't.

I was going downstairs to breakfast, holding on to the bannisters at one side and using nurse's shoulder as my other crutch, when I saw the brightest picture I have ever beheld. Baby and Martin were on hands and knees on the rag-work hearthrug, face to face—Martin calling her to come, Isabel lifting up her little head to him, like a fledgling in a nest, and both laughing with that gurgling sound as of water bubbling out of a bottle.

This sight broke all the breath out of me at the very first moment. And when Martin, after putting me into my place in the *chiollagh,* plunged immediately into a rapturous account of his preparations for our departure—how we were to be married by special license at the High Bailiff's on the tenth (if that date would do), how I was to rest a day and then travel up to London on the twelfth, and then rest other four days (during which warm clothes could be bought for me), and sail by the *Orient* on the sixteenth—I could not find it in my heart to tell him then of the inexorable fate that confronted us.

It was cowardice, I knew, and sooner or later I should have to pay for it. But when he went on to talk about baby, and appealed to his mother to say if she wouldn't look after Girlie when I was gone, and Christian Ann (in such a different tone) said Yes, she would look after Girlie when I was gone, I decided that I dared not tell him at all—I would die rather than do so.

The end of it all is that I have arranged with Christian Ann, the old doctor, and Father Dan that Time and Martin's own observation are to tell him what is going to happen, and none of us are to say anything about it.

What a deceiver I am, though! I put it all down to my unselfish love for Martin. It would be such a blow to him—

disturbing his plans, upsetting everything, perhaps causing him to postpone his Expedition, or even to abandon it altogether. "Let the truth fall soft on him. He'll see it soon enough. Don't let us be cruel."

The dear sweet, unsuspecting old darlings have taken it all in—all my vain and cowardly selfishness. I am to play the part of pretending to fall in with Martin's plans, and they are to stand by and say nothing.

Can I do it? I wonder, I wonder!

July 15. I am becoming quite a great actress! It's astonishing to see how I develop my deceptions under all sorts of veils and disguises.

Martin told me to-day that he had given up the idea of leaving me at Wellington and had determined to take me on to Winter Quarters, having met, on the way to Windsor, some great specialist in my kind of malady (I wonder how much he knows of it), who declared that the climate of the Antarctic would act on me like magic.

Such glorious sunshine in summer! Such crisp, dry, stimulating air! New life with every breath! Such a stunning little house, too, so cosy and comfortable! And then the men whom he would leave behind while he slipped down South—they would worship me!

"How splendid! How glorious!" I cried. "How delightful to be mistress over a houseful of big, hungry, healthy boys, who come in out of the snow and want to eat up everything!"

Sometimes I feel myself being carried away by my own acting, and then I see the others (Christian Ann and the old doctor and Father Dan) dropping their heads or stealing out of the room.

I wish I were not so weak. I feel no pain whatever. Only this temperature during the nights and the ever-deepening exhaustion in the mornings.

July 16. I am keeping it up! To-day I was alone with Martin for a long hour in the garden-house. Weather soft and beautiful, the heavens blue, and gleams of sunshine coming through the trellis-work.

Merely to sit beside my darling with his odour of health is to feel a flood of bodily strength coursing through me, enough to make me forget that I am a frail thing myself, who could be blown away by a puff of wind. But to hear him talk on his own subject is to be lifted up to the highest reaches of the soul.

I always say there is a dumb poet in every explorer; but the poet wasn't dumb to-day when Martin talked about the cyclone or anticyclone, or whatever it is which covers the region of the South Pole like a cap, and determines the weather of a great part of the habitable globe.

"We are going to take from God His word and pass it on to the world," he said.

After that he made reference (for the first time since his return) to the difficulties of our position, saying what a glorious thing it would be to escape to that great free region from the world of civilisation, with its effete laws and worn-out creeds which enslave humanity.

"Only a month to-day until we start, and you'll be well enough to travel then, dearest."

"Yes, yes, only a month to-day, and I shall be well enough then, dearest."

Oh, Mary O'Neill! How much longer will you be able to keep it up, dear?

July 17. Martin brought the proofs of his new book from London, and to-day in the summer-house (bluebells paling out and hanging their heads, but the air full of the odour of fruit trees) he and Dr. O'Sullivan and I have been correcting "galleys"—the doctor reading aloud, Martin smoking his briar-root pipe, and I (in a crater of cushions) supposed to be sitting as judge and jury.

Such simple, straight, natural writing! There may have been a thousand errors but my ears heard none of them. The breathless bits about the moments when death was near; the humorous bits about patching the tent with the tails of their shirts when an overturned lamp burnt a hole in the canvas—this was all I was conscious of until I was startled by the sound of a sepulchral voice, groaning out "Oh Lord a-massy me!" and by the sight of a Glengarry cap over the top of the fuchsia hedge. Old Tommy was listening from the road.

We sat late over our proofs and then, the dew having begun to fall, Martin said he must carry me indoors lest my feet should get wet—which he did, with the result that, remembering what had happened on our first evening at Castle

Raa, I had a pretty fit of hysterics as soon as we reached the house.

"Let's skip, Commanther," was the next thing I heard, and then I was helped upstairs to bed.

July 18. What a flirt I am becoming! Having conceived the idea that Dr. O'Sullivan is a little wee bit in love with me too, I have been playing him off against Martin.

It was so delicious (after all I have gone through) to have two magnificent men, out of the heroic youth of the world, waiting hand and foot on one little woman, that the feminine soul in me to-day couldn't resist the temptation to an innocent effort at coquetry.

So before we began business on the proofs I told Martin that, if he was determined to leave me behind at winter quarters while he went away to the Pole, he must allow Dr. O'Sullivan to remain behind to take care of me.

Of course the doctor rose to my bait like a dear, crying:

"He will too—by St. Patrick and St. Thomas he will, and a mighty proud man he'll be entirely. . . ."

But good gracious! A momentary shadow passed over Martin's face, then came one of his big broad smiles, then out shot his clinched fist, and . . . the poor doctor and his garden seat were rolling over each other on the grass.

However, we got through without bloodshed, and did a good day's work on the book.

I must not write any more. I have always written in my own book at night, when I haven't been able to get any kind of Christian sleep; but I'm weaker now, so must stop, lest I shouldn't have strength enough for Martin's.

July 20. Oh dear! I am dragging all these other poor dears into my deceptions. Christian Ann does not mind what lies, or half-lies, she has to tell in order to save pain to her beloved son. But the old doctor! And Father Dan!

To-day itself, as Martin's mother would say, I had to make my poor old priest into a shocking story-teller.

I developed a cough a few weeks ago, and though it is not really of much account I have been struggling to smother it while Martin has been about, knowing he is a doctor himself, and fearing his ear might detect the note.

But this afternoon (whether a little damp, with a soft patter of sweet rain on the trees and the bushes) I had a rather bad bout, at which Martin's face looked grave, until I laughed and said:

"It's nothing! I've had this sort of cough every summer since I was born—haven't I, Father Dan?"

"Ye-es."

I shall have to remember that in my next confession, but what Father Dan is to do I really don't know.

JULY 21. I have been rather down to-day about a newspaper that came to me anonymously from Paris, with a report marked for my special delectation.

"FASHIONABLE MARRIAGE OF AN ENGLISH PEER AND AN AMERICAN HEIRESS."

My husband's and Alma's! It took place at the American Embassy, and was attended by great numbers of smart people. There was a long account of the grandeur of the bride's dress and of the splendour of the bridegroom's presents. They have taken an apartment on the Champs Elysées and will spend most of the year in Paris.

Ah well, why should I trouble about a matter that so little concerns me? Alma is still beautiful; she will be surrounded by admirers; her salon will be frequented by the fashionable parasites of Europe and America.

As for my husband, the straw-fire of his wife's passion for him will soon burn out, especially now that she has gained what she wanted—his name, his title.

* * * * * * *

Martin carried me upstairs to bed to-night. I was really feeling weaker than usual, but we made a great game of it. Nurse went first, behind a mountain of pillows; Martin and I came next, with his arms about my body and mine around his neck; and Dr. O'Sullivan last, carrying two tall brass candlesticks.

How we laughed! We all laughed together, as if trying to see which of us could laugh the loudest. Only Christian Ann looked serious, standing at the bottom of the stairs, nursing baby in her nightdress.

It is three o'clock in the morning as I write, and I can hear our laughter still—only it sounds like sobbing now.

JULY 22. Have heard something to-day that has taken all the warmth of life out of me. It is about my father, whom the old doctor still attends. Having been told of my husband's marriage he has announced his intention of claiming my child if anything happens to me!

What his object may be I do not know. He cannot be thinking of establishing a claim to my husband's title—Isabel being a girl. Remembering something his lawyer said about the marriage settlement when I consulted him on the subject of divorce, I can only assume that (now he is poor) he is trying to recover the inheritance he settled on my husband.

It frightens me—raising my old nightmare of a lawsuit about the legitimacy of my child. I want to speak to Martin about it. Yet how can I do so without telling him the truth which I have been struggling so hard to conceal?

JULY 23. Oh, Mary O'Neill, what are you coming to?

I told Martin about father's threat, only I gave it another colour. He had heard of the Reverend Mother's visit, so I said the rumour had reached my father that I intended to enter a convent, and he had declared that, if I did so, he would claim my child from Christian Ann, being its nearest blood relation.

"Can he do so—when I am . . . when we are gone?" I asked.

I thought Martin's strong face looked sterner than I had ever seen it. He made a vague reply and left me soon afterwards on some sort of excuse.

About an hour later he came back to carry me upstairs, and just as he was setting me down, and Christian Ann was coming in with the candles, he whispered:

"Don't worry about Girlie. I've settled that matter, I'm thinking."

What has he done, I wonder?

MEMORANDUM OF MARTIN CONRAD

What I had done is easily told. I had gone straight to Daniel O'Neill himself, intending to know the truth of the story and to act accordingly.

Already I knew enough to scent mischief. I could not be so stupefied into blindness of what was going on under my eyes as not to see that the dirty question of money, and perhaps the dirtier question of the aims and expectations of the woman MacLeod, were at the root of the matter that was distressing my darling.

Daniel O'Neill had left the Big House and gone to live in his mother's old cottage for two reasons—first, to delude the law into the idea that he was himself utterly ruined by the bankruptcy to which he had brought the whole island; and next, to gratify the greed of his mistress, who wanted to get him to herself at the end, so that he might be persuaded to marry her (if it were only on his death-bed) and so establish, against any claim of his daughter's, her widow's rights in what a husband leaves behind him—which is half of everything in Ellan.

What connection this had with the man's desire to get hold of the child I had yet to learn; but I meant to learn it without another hour's delay, so I set off for the cottage on the curragh.

It was growing dark, and not being sure of my way through the ever-changing bypaths of the bog land, I called on Father Dan to guide me. The old priest seemed to know my errand (the matter my darling had communicated as a secret being common knowledge), and at first he looked afraid.

"Well . . . yes, yes . . . why shouldn't I?" he said, and then, "Yes, I will, I will"—with the air of a man who had made up his mind to a daring enterprise.

Our curragh is a stretch of wild marsh lying over against the sea, undrained, only partly cultivated, half covered with sedge and sallow bushes, and consequently liable to heavy mists. There was a mist over it that night, and hence it was not easy even for Father Dan (accustomed to midnight visits to curragh cottages) to find the house which had once been the home of "Neale the Lord."

We rooted it out at last by help of the parish constable, who was standing at the corner of a by-road talking to the coachman of a gorgeous carriage waiting there, with its two splendid horses smoking in the thick night air.

When, over the shingle of what we call "the street," we reached the low straggling crofter-cottage under its thick trammon tree (supposed to keep off the evil spirits), I rapped with my knuckles at the door, and it was opened by a tall, scraggy woman with a candle in her hand.

This was Nessy MacLeod, harder and uglier than ever, with her red hair combed up, giving her the appearance of a bunch of carrots over two stalks of rhubarb.

Almost before I had time to say that we had come to see Mr. O'Neill, and to step into the house while saying so, a hoarse, husky, querulous man's voice cried from within:

"Who is it, Nessy?"

"It's Father Dan, and Martin . . . I mean Sir . . . ."

"That'll do," I said, and the next moment we were in the living-room—a bare, bleak, comfortless Curraghman's kitchen.

A more incongruous sight than we saw there human eyes never beheld.

Daniel O'Neill, a shadow of the big brute creature he once was, a shrivelled old man, with his bony hands scored and contracted like an autumn leaf, his shrunken legs scarcely showing through his baggy trousers, his square face whiter than the wall behind it, and a piece of red flannel hanging over his head like a cowl, sat in the elbow-chair at the side of the hearth-fire, while at a deal table, which was covered with papers that looked like law deeds and share certificates (being stamped and sealed), sat the Bishop of the island, and its leading lawyer, Mr. Curphy.

On hearing my name and seeing me enter the house, Daniel O'Neill lost all control of himself. He struggled to his feet by help of a stick, and as I walked up to him he laid hold of me.

"You devil!" he cried. "You infernal villain! You . . ."

But it is of no use to repeat what else he said in the fuming of his rage, laying hold of me by the collar of my coat, and tugging at it as if he would drag me to his feet.

I was half sorry for the man, badly as I thought of him, so I only opened his hand (easy enough to do, for the grip was gone from it) and said:

"You're an old man, sir, and you're a sick man—don't tempt me to forget that you are the father of Mary O'Neill. Sit down."

He sat down, breathless and broken, without another word. But the Bishop, with a large air of outraged dignity, faced about to poor Father Dan (who was standing near the door, turning his round hat in his trembling hands) and said:

"Father Donovan, did you know that Mr. O'Neill was very ill?"

"I did, Monsignor," said Father Dan.

"And that a surgeon is coming from London to perform an operation upon him—did you know that?"

"I did, Monsignor."

"Did you know also that *I* was here to-night to attend with Mr. Curphy to important affairs and perhaps discharge some sacred duties?"

"I knew that too, Monsignor."

"Then," said the Bishop, pointing at me, "how dare you bring this man here—this man of all others, who has been the chief instrument in bringing shame and disgrace upon our poor sick friend and his deeply injured family?"

"So that's how you look at it, is it, Monsignor?"

"Yes, sir, that *is* how I look at it, and I am sorry for a priest of my Church who has so weakened his conscience by sympathy with notorious sinners as to see things in any other light."

"Sinners, Bishop?"

"Didn't you hear me, Father Donovan? Or do you desire me to use a harder name for them—for one of them in particular, on whom you have wasted so much weak sentimentality, to the injury of your spiritual influence and the demoralisation of your parish. I have warned you already. Do you wish me to go further, to remove you from your Presbytery, or perhaps report your conduct to those who have power to take the frock off your back? What standard of sanctity for the sacrament of Holy Matrimony do you expect to maintain while you degrade it by openly associating with a woman who has broken her marriage vows and become little better . . . I grieve to say it [with a deep inclination of the head towards the poor wreck in the elbow-chair] little better than a common. . . ."

I saw the word that was coming, and I was out in an instant. But there was somebody before me. It was Father Dan. The timid old priest seemed to break in one moment the bonds of a life-long tyranny.

"What's that you say, Monsignor?" he cried in a shrill voice. "*I* degrade the sacrament of Holy Matrimony? Never in this world! But if there's anybody in the island of Ellan who has done that same every day of his life, it's yourself, and never more cruelly and shamefully than in the case we're talking of at this present speaking."

"I'm not used to this kind of language from my clergy, Father Donovan," began the Bishop, but before he could say more Father Dan caught him up by crying:

"Perhaps not, Monsignor. But you've got to hear for once, and that's now. When this man [pointing to Daniel O'Neill] for his own purposes wanted to marry his daughter (who was a child and had no choice in the matter) to one of another faith, a man who didn't believe in the sacrament of marriage as we know it, who was it that paved the way for him?"

"You actually mean that *I*. . . ."

"I mean that without your help, Monsignor, a good girl could never have been married to a bad man. You didn't act in ignorance, either. When somebody told you—somebody who is here now—that the man to whom you were going to marry that innocent girl was a notorious loose liver, a profligate, a reprobate, a betrayer of women, and a damned scoundrel. . . ."

"Go on, Father Dan; that's God's own name for him," I said, when the old priest caught his breath for a moment, terrified by the word that had burst from his lips.

"Let's have an end of this," said the Bishop mightily.

"Wait a bit, sir," I said, and then Father Dan went on to say how he had been told there was nothing to my story, and how he had been forbidden to inquire into it.

"That's how you made *me* a party to this wicked marriage, God and His Holy Mother pardon me! And now that it has come to the end you might have expected, and the poor helpless child who was bought and sold like a slave is in the position of the sinner, you want me to cut her off, to turn the hearts of all good people against her, to cast her out of communion, to make her a thing to point the finger at—me, her spiritual father who baptized her, taking her out of the arms of the angel who bore her and giving her to Christ—or if I won't you'll deprive me of my living, you'll report me to Rome, you'll unfrock me. . . ."

"Do it, Monsignor," cried Father Dan, taking a step nearer to the Bishop and lifting a trembling hand over his head. "Do it, if our Holy Church will permit you, and I'll put a wallet on my old shoulders and go round the houses of my parish in my old age, begging a bite of bread and a basin of meal, and sleeping under a thorn bush, rather than lay my head on my pillow and know that that poor victim of your wicked scheming is in the road."

The throbbing and breaking of the old priest's voice had compelled me to drop my head, and it was not until I heard the sneck of the lock of the outer door that I realised that, overcome by his emotion, he had fled from the house.

"And now I guess you can follow your friend," said Daniel O'Neill.

"Not yet, sir," I answered. "I have something to say first."

"Well, well, what is it, please?" said the lawyer sharply and insolently, looking to where I was standing with folded arms at one side of the hearth-place.

"You'll hear soon enough, Master Curphy," I answered.

Then, turning back to Daniel O'Neill, I told him what rumour had reached my dear one of his intentions with regard to her child, and asked him to say whether there was any truth in it.

"Answer the man, Curphy," said Daniel O'Neill, and thereupon the lawyer, with almost equal insolence, turned to me and said:

"What is it you wish to know, sir?"

"Whether, if Mary O'Neill is unable from any cause to keep control of her child (which God forbid!), her father intends to take possession of it."

"Why shouldn't he? If the mother dies, for instance, her father will be the child's legal guardian."

"But if by that time the father is dead too—what then?"

"Then the control of the child will—with the consent of the court—devolve upon his heir and representative."

"Meaning this lady?" I asked, pointing to the woman MacLeod, who was now standing at the back of Daniel O'Neill's chair.

"Possibly."

"And what will she do with it?"

"Do with it?"

The lawyer was running his fingers through his long beard and trying to look perplexed.

"Mr. Curphy, I'll ask you not to pretend to be unable to understand me. If and when this lady gets possession of Mary O'Neill's child, what is she going to do with it?"

"Very well," said the advocate, seeing I meant business, "since my client permits me to speak, I'll tell you plainly. Whatever the child's actual parentage . . . perhaps you know best . . ."

"Go on, sir."

"Whatever the child's parentage, it was born in wedlock.

Even the recent divorce proceedings have not disturbed that. Therefore we hold that the child has a right to the inheritance which in due time should come to Mary O'Neill's offspring by the terms of the settlement upon her husband."

It was just as I expected, and every drop of my blood boiled at the thought of my darling's child in the hands of that frozen-hearted woman.

"So that is the law, is it?"

"That is the law in Ellan."

"In the event of Mary O'Neill's death, and her father's death, her child and all its interests will come into the hands of. . . ."

"Of her father's heir and representative."

"Meaning, again, this lady?"

"Probably."

The woman at the back of the chair began to look restless.

"I don't know, sir," she said, "if your repeated references to me are intended to reflect upon my character, or my ability to bring up the child well and look after its interests properly."

"They are, madam—they most certainly and assuredly are," I answered.

"Daniel!" she cried.

"Be quiet, gel," said Daniel O'Neill. "Let the man speak. We'll see what he has come for presently. Go on, sir."

I took him at his word, and was proceeding to say that as I understood things it was intended to appeal to the courts in order to recover (nominally for the child) succession to the money which had been settled on Mary O'Neill's husband at the time of their marriage, when the old man cried, struggling again to his feet:

"There you are! The money! It's the money the man's after! He took my daughter, and now he's for taking my fortune—what's left of it, anyway. He shan't, though! No, by God he shan't! . . . Go back to your woman, sir. Do you hear me?—your woman, and tell her that neither you nor she shall touch one farthing of my fortune. I'm seeing to that now. It's what we're here for to-night—before that damnable operation to-morrow, for nobody knows what will come of it. She has defied me and ruined me, and made me the byword of the island, God's curse on her. . . ."

"Daniel! Daniel!" cried the MacLeod woman, trying to pacify the infuriated madman and to draw him back to his seat.

I would have given all I had in the world if Daniel O'Neill could have been a strong man at that moment, instead of a poor wisp of a thing with one foot in the grave. But I controlled myself as well as I could and said:

"Mr. O'Neill, your daughter doesn't want your fortune, and as for myself, you and your money are no more to me than an old hen sitting on a nest of addled eggs. Give it to the lady at the back of your chair—she has earned it, apparently."

"Really," said the Bishop, who had at length recovered from Father Dan's onslaught. "Really, Sir What-ever-your-name is, this is too outrageous—that you should come to this lonely house at this time of night, interrupting most urgent business, not to speak of serious offices, and make injurious insinuations against the character of a respectable person—you, sir, who had the audacity to return openly to the island with the partner of your sin, and to lodge her in the house of your own mother—your own mother, sir, though Heaven knows what kind of mother it can be who harbours her son's sin-laden mistress, his woman, as our sick friend says. . . ."

Lord! how my hands itched! But controlling myself again, with a mighty effort I said:

"Monsignor, I don't think I should advise you to say that again."

"Why not, sir?"

"Because I have a deep respect for your cloth and should be sorry to see it soiled."

"Violence!" cried the Bishop, rising to his feet. "You threaten me with violence? . . . Is there no policeman in this parish, Mr. Curphy?"

"There's one at the corner of the road, Bishop," I said. "I brought him along with me. I should have brought the High Bailiff too, if there had been time. You would perhaps be no worse for a few witnesses to the business that seems to be going on here."

Saying this, as I pointed to the papers on the table, I had hit harder than I knew, for both the Bishop and the lawyer (who had also risen) dropped back into their seats and looked at each other with expressions of surprise.

Then, stepping up to the table, so as to face the four of them, I said, as calmly and deliberately as I could:

"Now listen to me. I am leaving this island in about three weeks time, and expect to be two years—perhaps three years —away. Mary O'Neill is going with me—as my wife. She intends to leave her child in the care of my mother, and I intend to promise her that she may set her mind at ease that it shall never under any circumstances be taken away. You seem to have made up your minds that she is going to die. Please God she may disappoint your expectations and come back strong and well. But if she does not, and I have to return alone, and if I find that her child has been removed from the protection in which she left it, do you know what I shall do?"

"Go to the courts, I presume," said the lawyer.

"Oh dear, no! I'll go to no courts, Mr. Curphy. I'll go to the people who have set the courts in motion—which means that I'll go to *you* and *you* and *you* and *you*. Heaven knows how many of us may be living when that day comes; but as surely as I am, if I find that the promise I made to Mary O'Neill has been a vain one, and that her child is under this woman's control and the subject of a lawsuit about this man's money, and she in her grave, as surely as the Lord God is above us there isn't one soul of you here present who will be alive the following morning."

That seemed to be enough for all of them. Even old Daniel O'Neill (the only man in the house who had an ounce of fight in him) dropped his head back in his chair, with his mouth wide open and his broken teeth showing behind his discoloured lips.

I thought Father Dan would have been waiting for me under the trammon on "the street," but he had gone back to the Presbytery and sent Tommy the Mate to lead me through the mist and the by-lanes to the main road.

The old salt seemed to have a "skute" into the bad business which had brought out the Bishop and the lawyer at that late hour, and on parting from me at the gate of Sunny Lodge he said:

"Lord-a-massy me, what for hasn't ould Tom Dug a fortune coming to him?"

And when I asked him what he would do with a fortune if he had one he answered:

"Do? Have a tunderin' [thundering] good law-shoot and sattle some o' them big fellas."

Going to bed in the "Plough" that night, I had an ugly vision of the scene being enacted in the cottage on the curragh (a scene not without precedent in the history of the world, though the priesthood as a whole is so pure and noble)—the midnight marriage of a man dying in unnatural hatred of his own daughter (and she the sweetest woman in the world) while the priest and the prostitute divided the spoils.

[END OF MARTIN CONRAD'S MEMORANDUM]

ONE HUNDRED AND SIXTEENTH CHAPTER

JULY 25. The old doctor brought me such sad and startling news to-day. My poor father is dead—died yesterday, after an operation which he had deferred too long, refusing to believe it necessary.

The dreadful fact has hitherto been kept secret not only from me but from everybody, out of fear of legal proceedings arising from the failure of banks, &c., which has brought the whole island to the verge of bankruptcy.

He was buried this morning at old St. Mary's—very early, almost before daybreak, to suit the convenience of the Bishop, who wished to catch the first steamer *en route* for Rome.

As a consequence of these strange arrangements, and the secrecy that has surrounded my father's life of late, people are saying that he is not dead at all, that in order to avoid prosecution he has escaped from the island (going off with the Bishop in a sort of disguise), and that the coffin put into the grave this morning did not contain a human body.

"But that's all wrong," said the old doctor. "Your father is really dead and buried, and the strange man who went away with the Bishop was the London surgeon who performed the operation."

I can hardly realise it—that the strong, stalwart being, the stern old lion whose heavy foot, tramping through my poor mother's room, used to make the very house shake, is gone.

He died as he had lived, it seems. To the last self-centred, inflexible, domineering—a peasant yet a great man (if greatness is to be measured by power), ranking, I think, in his own little scene of life with the tragic figures of history.

I have spent the day in bitter grief. Ever since I was a child there has been a dark shadow between my father and me. He was like a beetling mountain, always hanging over my head. I wonder whether he wished to see me at the end. Perhaps he did, and was over-persuaded by the cold and savourless nature of Nessy MacLeod, who is giving it out, I hear, that grief and shame for me killed him.

People will say he was a vulgar parvenu, a sycophant, a snob—heaven knows what. All wrong! For the true reading of his character one has to go back to the day when he was a ragged boy and the liveried coachman of the "bad Lord Raa" lashed at his mother on the road, and he swore that when he was a man she should have a carriage of her own, and then "nobody should never lash her."

He found Gessler's cap in the market-place and was no more willing than Tell to bend the knee to it.

My poor father! He did wrong to use another life, another soul, for either his pride or his revenge. But God knows best how it will be with him, and if he was the first cause of making my life what it has been, I send after him (I almost tremble to say it), if not my love, my forgiveness.

July 26. I begin to realise that after all I was not romancing when I told the old dears that Martin and his schemes would collapse if I failed him. Poor boy, he is always talking as if everything depended upon me. It is utterly frightening to think what would happen to the Expedition if he thought I could not sail with him on the sixteenth.

Martin is not one of the men who weep for their wives as if the sun had suffered eclipse, and then marry again before their graves are green. So, having begun on my great scheme of pretending that I am getting better every day, and shall be "ready to go, never fear," I have to keep it up.

I begin to suspect, though, that I am not such a wonderful actress after all. Sometimes in the midst of my raptures I see him looking at me uneasily as if he were conscious of a certain effort. At such moments I have to avoid his eyes lest anything should happen, for my great love seems to be always lying in wait to break down my make-believe.

To-day (though I had resolved not to give way to tears) when he was talking about the voyage out, and how it would "set me up" and how the invigorating air of the Antarctic would "make another woman of me," I cried:

"How splendid! How glorious!"

"Then why are you crying?" he asked.

"Oh, good gracious, that's nothing—for *me*," I answered.

But if I am throwing dust in Martin's eyes I am deceiving nobody else, it seems. To-night after he and Dr. O'Sullivan had gone back to the "Plough," Father Dan came in to ask Christian Ann how she found me, and being answered rather sadly, I heard him say:

"*Ugh cha nee!* [Woe is me!] What is life? It is even a vapour which appeareth for a little while and then vanisheth away."

And half an hour later, when old Tommy came to bring me some lobsters (he still declares they are the only food for invalids) and to ask "how's the lil woman now?" I heard him moaning, as he was going out:

"There'll be no shelter for her this voyage, the *vogh!* She'll carry the sea in with her to the Head, I'm thinking."

July 27. I *must* keep it up—I must, I must! To allow Martin's hopes and dreams to be broken in upon now would be enough to kill me outright.

I don't want to be unkind, but some explorers leave the impression that their highest impulse is the praise of achievement, and once they have done something all they've got to do next is to stay at home and talk about it. Martin is not like that. Exploration is a passion with him. The "lure of the little voices" and the "call of the Unknown" have been with him from the beginning, and they will be with him to the end.

I cannot possibly think of Martin dying in bed, and being laid to rest in the green peace of English earth—dear and sweet as that is to tamer natures, mine for instance. I can only think of that wild heroic soul going up to God from the broad white wilderness of the stormy South, and leaving his body under heaving hummocks of snow with blizzards blowing a requiem over his grave.

Far off may that glorious ending be, but shall my poor failing heart make it impossible? Never, never, never!

Moral—I'm going to get up every day—whatever my nurse may say.

July 28. I was rocking baby to sleep this afternoon when Christian Ann, who was spinning by the fire, told me of a quarrel between Aunt Bridget and Nessy MacLeod.

It seems that Nessy (who says she was married to my father immediately before the operation) claims to be the heiress of all that is left, and as the estate includes the Big House she is "putting the law on" Aunt Bridget to obtain possession.

Poor Aunt Bridget! What a pitiful end to all her scheming for Betsy Beauty, all her cruelties to my long-suffering mother, all her treatment of me—to be turned out of doors by her own step-daughter!

When old Tommy heard of the lawsuit, he said:

"Chut! Sarves her right, I say! It's the black life the Big Woman lived before, and it's the black life she'll be living now, and her growing old, and the Death looking in on her."

July 29. We have finished the proofs to-day and Dr. O'Sullivan has gone back with them. I thought he looked rather *wae* when he came to say good-bye to me, and though he made a great deal of noise his voice was husky when (swearing by his favourite Saints) he talked about "returning for the tenth with all the boys, including Treacle."

Of course that was nonsense about his being in love with me. But I'm sure he loves me all the same—many, many people love me. I don't know what I've done to deserve all this love. I have had a great deal of love in my life now that I come to think of it.

We worked hard over the last of the proofs, and I suppose I was tired at the end of them, for when Martin carried me upstairs to-night there was less laughter than usual, and I thought he looked serious as he set me down by the bed.

I bantered him about that ("A penny for your thoughts, mister"), but towards midnight the truth flashed upon me—I am becoming thinner and therefore lighter every day, and he is beginning to notice it.

Moral—I must try to walk upstairs in future.

July 30. Ah, me! It looks as if it were going to be a race between me and the Expedition—which shall come off first—and sometimes I am afraid I am going to be the loser!

Martin ought to sail on the sixteenth—only seventeen days! I am expected to be married on the tenth—only eleven! Oh, Mary O'Neill, what a strange contradictory war you are waging! Look straight before you, dear, and don't be afraid.

I had a letter from the Reverend Mother this evening. She is crossing from Ireland to-morrow, which is earlier than she intended, so I suppose Father Dan must have sent for her.

I do hope Martin and she will get on comfortably together. A struggle between my religion and my love would be more than I could bear now.

July 31. When I awoke this morning very late (I had slept after daybreak) I was thinking of the Reverend Mother, but lo! who should come into the room but the doctor from Blackwater!

He was very nice; said I had promised to let him see me again, so he had taken me at my word.

I watched him closely while he examined me, and I could see that he was utterly astonished—couldn't understand how I came to be alive—and said he would never again deny the truth of the old saying about dying of a broken heart, because I was clearly living by virtue of a whole one.

I made pretence of wanting something in order to get nurse out of the room, and then reached up to the strange doctor and whispered "*When?*"

He wasn't for telling me, talked about the miraculous power of God which no science could reckon with, but at last I got a word out of him which made me happy, or at least content.

Perhaps it's sad, but many things look brighter that are far more sorrowful—dying of a broken heart, for example, and (whatever else is amiss with me) mine is not broken, but healed, gloriously healed, after its bruises, so thank God for that, anyway!

* * * * * * *

Just had some heavenly sleep and such a sweet dream! I thought my darling mother came to me. "You're cold, my child," she said, and then covered me up in the bedclothes. I talked about leaving my baby, and she said she had had to do the same—leaving me. "That's what we mothers come to—so many of us—but heaven is over all," she whispered.

August 1. I really cannot understand myself, so it isn't a matter for much surprise if nobody else understands me. In spite of what the strange doctor said yesterday I dressed up grandly to-day, not only in my tea-gown, but some beautiful old white Irish lace which nurse lent me to wrap about my throat.

I think the effect was rather good, and when I went downstairs leaning on nurse's shoulder, there was Martin waiting for me, and though he did not speak (couldn't perhaps), the look that came into his blue eyes was the same as on that last night at Castle Raa when he said something about a silvery fir-tree with its dark head against the sky.

Oh, my own darling, I could wish to live for you, such as I am, if I could be of any use, if I would not be a hindrance rather than a help, if our union were right, if, in short, God Himself had not already answered to all such questionings and beseechings, His great, unalterable, irrevocable No!

August 2. The Reverend Mother, who arrived in the island last night, has been with me all day. I think she *knows,* for she has said nothing more about the convent—only (with her eyes so soft and tender) that she intends to remain with me a little while, having need of rest herself.

To my surprise and joy, Martin and she have got on famously. This evening she told me that, in spite of all (I know what she meant by that), she is willing to believe that he is a true man, and, notwithstanding his unhappy opinions about the Church, a Christian gentleman.

Such a touching thing happened to-day. We were all sitting in the garden, (sun warm, light breeze off the sea, ripe corn chattering in the field opposite), when I felt a tugging at my skirts, and who should it be but Isabel, who had been crawling along the dry grass plucking daisies, and now, dragging herself up to my side, emptied them into my lap.

No, I will not give way to tears any more as long as I live, yet it rather "touches me up," as Martin says, to see how one's vainest dreams seem to come to pass.

I don't know if Martin thought I was going to break down, but he rattled away about Girlie having two other mothers now—Grandma, who would keep her while we were down South, and the Reverend Mother, who would take her to school when she was old enough.

So there's nothing more to fear about baby.

But what about Martin himself? Am I dealing fairly in allowing him to go on with his preparations? Isn't it a kind of cruelty not to tell him the truth?

This problem is preying on my mind. If I could only get some real sleep perhaps I could solve it.

August 3. I am growing weaker every day. No pain; no cough; nothing but exhaustion. Father Dan told me this morning that I was growing more than ever like my mother—that "sweet saint whom the Lord has made His own." I know what he means—like her as she was at the last.

My poor old priest is such a child! A good old man is always a child—a woman can see through and through him.

Ah, me! I am cared for now as I never was before, yet I feel like baby when she is tired after walking round the chairs and comes to be nursed. What children we all are at the end—just children!

August 4. Father Dan came across, in breathless excitement to-day. It seems the poor soul has been living in daily dread of some sort of censure from Rome through his Bishop—about his toleration of me, I suppose—but behold! it's the Bishop himself who has suffered censure, having been sent into quarantine at one of the Roman Colleges and forbidden to return to his diocese.

And now, lo! a large sum of money comes from Rome for the poor of Ellan, to be distributed by Father Dan!

I think I know whose money it is that has been returned; but the dear Father suspects nothing, and is full of a great scheme for a general thanksgiving, with a procession of our village people to old St. Mary's and then Rosary and Benediction.

It is to come off on the afternoon of the tenth, it seems, my last day in Ellan, after my marriage, but before my departure.

How God governs everything!

August 6. It is really wrong of me to allow Martin to go on. This morning he told me he had bought the special license for our marriage, and this evening he showed me our tickets for Sydney—two berths, first cabin, steadiest part of the ship.

Oh, my dear heart, if you only knew that I have had my ticket these many days, and that it is to take me out first on the Great Expedition—to the still bigger Unknown, the Everlasting Sea, the Immeasurable Eternity!

I must be brave. Although I am a little cowardly sometimes, I *can* be brave.

I have definitely decided to-night that I will tell him. But how can I look into his face and say. . . .

August 7. I have made up my mind to write to Martin. One can say things so much easier in a letter—I can, anyway. Even my voice affects me—swelling and falling when I am moved, like a billow on the ocean.

I find my writing cannot any longer be done in a sitting position in bed, but I can prop my book on my breast and write lying down.

MARY O'NEILL'S LETTER TO MARTIN CONRAD

August 9th, 6 A.M.

My own Darling,—Strengthen yourself for what I am going to say. It will be very hard for you—I know that, dear.

To-morrow we were to have gone to the High Bailiff; this day week we were to have sailed for Sydney, and two months hence we were to have reached Winter Quarters.

But I cannot go with you to the High Bailiff's; I cannot go with you to Sydney; I cannot go with you to Winter Quarters; I cannot go anywhere from here. It is impossible, quite impossible.

I have loved too much, dear, so the power of life is burnt out for me. My great love—love for my mother, for my darling baby, and above all for you—has consumed me and I cannot live much longer.

Forgive me for not telling you this before—for deceiving you by saying that I was getting better and growing stronger when I knew I was not. I used to think it was cowardice which kept me from telling you the truth, but I see now that it was love, too.

I was so greedy of the happiness I have had since I came to this house of love that I could not reconcile myself to the loss of it. You will try to understand that (won't you, dear?), and so forgive me for keeping you in the dark down to the very last moment.

This will be a great grief to you. I would die with a glad heart to save you a moment's pain, yet I could not die at ease if I did not think you would miss me and grieve for me. I like to think that in the time to come people will say, "Once he loved Mary O'Neill, and now there is no other woman in the world for him." I should not be a woman if I did not feel like that—should I?

But don't grieve too much, dearest. Only think! If I had been strong and had years and years still to live, what a life would have been before me—before both of us.

We couldn't have lived apart, could we? And if we had married I should never have been able to shake off the thought that the world, which would always be opening its arms to you, did not want me. That would be so, wouldn't it—after all I have gone through? The world never forgives a woman for the injuries it inflicts on her itself, and I have had too many wounds, darling, to stand by your side and be any help to you.

Oh, I know what you would say, dearest. "She gave up everything for love of me, choosing poverty, obscurity, and pain above wealth and rank and ease, and therefore I will choose her before everything else in the world." But I know what would come to us in the end, dear, and I should always feel that your love for me had dragged you down, closed many of the doors of life to you. I should know that you were always hearing behind you the echoing footsteps of my fate, and that is the only thing I could not bear.

Besides, my darling, there is something else between us in this world—the Divine Commandment! Our blessed Lord says we can never be man and wife, and there is no getting beyond that, is there?

Oh, don't think I reproach myself with loving you—that I think it a sin to do so. I do not now, and never shall. He who made my heart what it is must know that I am doing no wrong.

And don't think I regret that night at Castle Raa. If I have to answer to God for that I will do so without fear, because I know He will know that, when the cruelty and self-seeking of others were trying to control my most sacred impulses, I was only claiming the right He gave me to be mistress of myself and sovereign of my soul.

You must not regret it either, dearest, or reproach yourself in any way, for when we stand together before God's footstool He will see that from the beginning I was yours and you were mine, and He will cover us with the wings of His loving mercy.

Then don't think, dear, that I have ever looked upon what happened afterwards—first in Ellan and then in London—as, in any sense, a punishment. I have never done that at any time, and now I believe from the bottom of my heart that, if I suffered while you were away, it was not for my sin but my salvation.

Think, dear! If you and I had never met again after my marriage, and if I had gone on living with the man they had married me to, my soul would have shrivelled up and died. That is what happens to the souls of so many poor women who are fettered for life to coarse and degrading husbands. But my soul has not died, dearest, and it is not dying, whatever my poor body may do, so I thank my gracious

God for the sweet and pure and noble love that has kept it alive.

All the same, my darling, to marry again is another matter. I took my vow before the altar, dear, and however ignorantly I took it, or under whatever persuasion or constraint, it is registered in heaven.

It cannot be for nothing, dear, that our blessed Lord made that stern Commandment. The Church may have given a wrong interpretation to it—you say it has, and I am too ignorant to answer you, even if I wished to, which I don't. But I am sure my Lord foresaw all such mistakes, and all the hardships that would come to many poor women (perhaps some men, too), as well as the wreck the world might fall to for want of this unyielding stay, when He issued His divine and irrevocable law that never under any circumstances should marriage be broken.

Oh, I am sure of it, dear, quite sure, and before His unsearchable wisdom I bow my head, although my heart is torn.

Yet think, darling, how light is the burden that is laid upon us! Marriage vows are for this world only. The marriage law of the Church which lasts as long as life does not go on one moment longer. The instant death sets my body free, my soul may fly to where it belongs. If I were going to live ten, twenty, thirty years, this might be cold comfort, but I am not.

Then why should we be sorry? You cannot be mine in this life and I cannot be yours, so Death comes in its mercy and majesty to unite us! Our love wiill go far beyond life, and the moment the barrier of death is passed our union will begin! And once it begins it will never end! So Death is not really a separator, but a great uniter! Don't you see that, dearest? One moment of parting—hardly a moment, perhaps—and then we shall be together through all Eternity! How wonderful! How glorious! How triumphant!

Do you believe in individual immortality, dear? I do. I believe that in the other life I shall meet and know my dear ones who are in heaven. More than that, I believe that the instant I pass from this life I shall live with my dear ones who are still on earth. That is why I am willing to go—because I am sure that the moment I draw my last breath I shall be standing by your side.

So don't let there be any weeping for me, dear. "Nothing is here for tears; nothing but well and fair.'' Always remember—love is immortal.

I will not say that I could not have wished to live a little longer—if things had been otherwise with both of us. I should like to live to see your book published and your work finished (I know it will be some day), and baby grow up to be a good girl and a beautiful one too (for that's something, isn't it?); and I should like to live a little longer for another reason, a woman's reason—simply to be loved, and to be told that I am loved, for though a woman may know that, she likes to hear it said and is never tired of hearing it.

But things have gone against us, and it is almost sinfully ungrateful to regret anything when we have so many reasons for thankfulness.

And then about Girlie—I used to think it would be terrible (for me, I mean) to die before she could be old enough to have any clear memory of her mother (such as I have of mine) to cherish and love—only the cold, blank, unfilled by a face, which must be all that remains to most of those whose parents passed away while they were children. But I am not afraid of that now, because I know that in the future, when our little girl asks about her mother, you will describe me to her as *you* saw and remember me—and that will be *so* much sweeter and lovelier than I ever was, and it will be *such* a joy to think that my daughter sees me through her father's eyes.

Besides, dearest, there is something still more thrilling—the thought that Girlie may grow to be like me (like what you *think* me), and that in the time to come she may startle you with undescribable resemblances, in her voice or smile, or laugh, to her mother in heaven, so that some day, perhaps, years and years hence, when she is quite grown up, she may touch your arm and you may turn quickly to look at her, and lo! it will seem to you as if Mary herself (*your* Mary) were by your side. Oh Death, where is thy sting? Oh grave, where is thy victory?

Go on with your great work, dearest. Don't let it flag from any cold feeling that I am lost to you. Whenever you think of me, say to yourself, ''Mary is here; Love is stronger than death, many waters cannot quench it.''

Did you ever read Browning? I have been doing so during the last few days, nurse (she is quite a thoughtful woman) having lent me his last volume. When I read the last lines of what is said to have been his last poem I thought of you, dear:

"No, at noonday in the bustle of man's work-time
Greet the unseen with a cheer!
Bid him forward, breast and back as either should be,
'Strive and thrive!' Cry 'Speed,—fight on, fare ever
There as here!'"

I am going to get up again to-day, dear, having something to do that is just a little important—to give you this manuscript book, in which I have been writing every day (or rather every night since you found me in London.

You will see what it is, and why it was written, so I'll say no more on that subject.

I am afraid you'll find it very egotistical, being mainly about myself; but I seem to have been looking into my soul all the time, and when one does that, and gets down to the deep places, one meets all other souls there, so perhaps I have been writing the lives of some women as well.

I once thought I could write a real book (you'll see what vain and foolish things I thought, especially in my darker moments) to show what a woman's life may be when, from any cause whatsoever, she is denied the right God gave her of choosing the best for herself and her children.

There is a dream lying somewhere there, dear, which is stirring the slumber of mankind, but the awakening will not be in my time certainly, and perhaps not even in Girlie's.

And yet, why not?

Do you know, dearest, what it was in your wonderful book which thrilled me most? It was your description of the giant iceberg you passed in the Antarctic Ocean—five hundred feet above the surface of the sea and therefore five hundred below it, going steadily on and on, against all the force of tempestuous wind and wave, by power of the current underneath.

Isn't the movement of all great things in life like that, dearest? So perhaps the world will be a better place for Girlie than it has been for me. And in any case, I shall always feel that, after all and in spite of everything, it has been glorious to be a woman.

* * * * * * *

And now, my own darling, though we are only to be separated for a little while, I want to write what I should like to say when I part from you to-morrow if I did not know that something in my throat would choke me.

I want to tell you again that I love you dearly, that I have never loved anybody but you, and that no marriage vows will keep me from loving you to the last.

I want to thank you for the great, great love you have given me in return—all the way back from the time when I was a child. Oh, my dearest, may God for ever bless you for the sunshine you have brought into my life—every single day of it, joyful days and sorrowful ones, bright days and dark, but all shining with the glory of your love.

Never allow yourself to think that my life has not been a happy one. Looking back on it now I feel as if I have always had happiness. And when I have not had happiness I have had something far higher and better—blessedness.

I have had *such* joy in my life, dear—joy in the beauty of the world, in the sunshine and the moon and the stars and the flowers and the songs of the birds, and then (apart from the divine love that is too holy to speak about) in my religion, in my beloved Church, in the love of my dear mother and my sweet child, and above all—above all in *you*.

I feel a sense of sacred thankfulness to God for giving you to me, and if it has not been for long in this life, it will be for ever in the next.

So good-bye, my dearest me—*just for a little moment!* My dearest one, Good-bye!

MARY O'NEILL.

MARY O'NEILL'S LAST NOTE
WRITTEN ON THE FLY-LEAVES OF HER MISSAL

AUGUST 9–10.

It is all over. I have given him my book. My secret is out. He knows now. I almost think he has known all along.

I had dressed even more carefully than usual, with nurse's Irish lace about my neck as a collar, and my black hair brushed smooth in my mother's manner, and when I went downstairs by help of my usual kind crutch (it is wonderful how strong I have been to-day) everybody said how much better I was looking.

Martin was there, and he took me into the garden. It was a little late in the afternoon, but such a sweet and holy time, with its clear air and quiet sunshine—one of those evenings when Nature is like a nun "breathless with adoration."

Although I had a feeling that it was to be our last time together we talked on the usual subjects—the High Bailiff, the special license, "the boys" of the *Scotia* who were coming over for my wedding, and how some of them would have to start out early in the morning.

But it didn't matter what we talked about. It was only what we felt, and I felt entirely happy—sitting there in my cushions, with my white hand in his brown one, looking into his clear eyes and ruddy face or up to the broad blue of the sky.

The red sun had begun to sink down behind the dark bar of St. Mary's Rock, and the daisies in the garden to close their eyes and drop their heads in sleep, when Martin became afraid of the dew.

Then we went back to the house—I walking firmly, by Martin's side, though I held his arm so close.

The old doctor was in his consulting room, nurse was in my room, and we could hear Christian Ann upstairs putting baby into her darling white cot—she sleeps with grandma now.

The time came for me to go up also, and then I gave him my book, which I had been carrying under my arm, telling him to read the last pages first.

Although we had never spoken of my book before he seemed to know all about it; and it flashed upon me at that moment that, while I thought I had been playing a game of make-believe with him, he had been playing a game of make-believe with me, and had known everything from the first. There was a certain relief in that, yet there was a certain sting in it, too. What strange creatures we are, we women!

For some moments we stood together at the bottom of the stairs, holding each other's hands. I was dreadfully afraid he was going to break down as he did at Castle Raa, and once again I had that thrilling, swelling feeling (the most heavenly emotion that comes into a woman's life, perhaps) that I, the weak one, had to strengthen the strong.

It was only for a moment, though, and then he put his great gentle arms about me, and kissed me on the lips, and said, *silently* but oh, so eloquently, "Good-bye darling, and God bless you!"

Then I walked upstairs alone, quite alone, and when I reached the top he was still at the bottom looking up at me. I smiled down to him, then walked firmly into my room and up to my bed, and then . . . down, all my strength gone in a moment.

* * * * * * *

I have had such a wonderful experience during the night. It was like a dream, and yet something more than a dream. I don't want to make too much of it—to say that it was a vision or any supernatural manifestation such as the blessed Margaret Mary speaks about. Perhaps it was only the result of memory operating on my past life, my thoughts and desires. But perhaps it was something higher and more spiritual, and God, for my comforting, has permitted me to look for one moment behind the veil.

I thought it was to-morrow—my wedding day, and the day of Father Dan's thanksgiving celebration—and I was sitting by my French window (which was wide open) to look at the procession.

I seemed to see everything—Father Dan in his surplice, the fishermen in their clean "ganzies," the village people in their Sunday clothes, the Rechabites, the Foresters, and the Oddfellows with their coloured badges and banners coming round the corner of the road, and the mothers with babies too young to be left looking on from the bridge.

I thought the procession passed under my window and went on to the church, which was soon crowded, leaving numbers of people to kneel on the path in front, as far down as the crumbling gate piers which lean towards each other, their foundations having given way.

Then I thought Benediction began, and when the congregation sang I sang also. I heard myself singing:

"Mater purissima,
Ora pro nobis."

Down to this moment I thought I had been alone, but now the Reverend Mother entered my room, and she joined me. I heard her deep rich voice under mine:

"Mater castissima
Ora pro nobis."

Then I thought the *Ora* ended, and in the silence that followed it I heard Christian Ann talking to baby on the gravel path below. I had closed my eyes, yet I seemed to see them, for I felt as if I were under some strange sweet anæsthetic which had taken away all pain but not all consciousness.

Then I thought I saw Martin come close under my window and lift baby up to me, and say something about her.

I tried to answer him and could not, but I smiled, and then there was darkness, in which I heard voices about me, with somebody sobbing and Father Dan saying, as he did on the morning my mother died:

"Don't call her back. She's on her way to God's beautiful paradise after all her suffering."

After that the darkness became still deeper, and the voices faded away, and then gradually a great light came, a beautiful, marvellous, celestial light, such as Martin describes when he speaks about the aurora, and then . . . I was on a broad white snowy plateau, and Martin was walking by my side.

How wonderful! How joyful! How eternally glorious!

* * * * * * *

It is 4 A.M. Some of "the boys" will be on their way to my wedding. Though I have been often ashamed of letting them come I am glad now for his sake that I didn't try to keep them back. With his comrades about him he will control himself and be strong.

* * * * * * *

Such a peaceful morning! There is just light enough to see St. Mary's Rock. It is like a wavering ghost moving in the vapour on the face of the deep. I can hear the far-off murmur of the sea. It is like the humming in a big shell. A bird is singing in the garden and the swallows are twittering in a nest under the thatch. A mist is lying over the meadows, and the tree tops seem to be floating between the earth and the sky.

How beautiful the world is!

Very soon the mist will rise, and the day will break and the sun will come again and . . . there will be no more night.

[END OF THE NARRATIVE OF MARY O'NEILL]

MEMORANDUM OF MARTIN CONRAD

My darling was right. I had known all along, but I had been hoping against hope—that the voyage would set her up, and the air of the Antarctic cure her.

Then her cheerfulness never failed her, and when she looked at me with her joyous eyes, and when her soft hand slipped into mine I forgot all my fears, so the blow fell on me as suddenly as if I had never expected it.

With a faint pathetic smile she gave me her book and I went back to my room at the inn and read it. I read all night and far into the next day—all her dear story, straight from her heart, written out in her small delicate, beautiful characters, with scarcely an erasure.

No use saying what I thought or went through. So many things I had never known before! Such love as I had never even dreamt of, and could never repay her for now!

How my whole soul rebelled against the fate that had befallen my dear one! If I have since come to share, however reluctantly, her sweet resignation, to bow my head stubbornly where she bowed hers so meekly (before the Divine Commandment), and to see that marriage, true marriage, is the rock on which God builds His world, it was not then that I thought anything about that.

I only thought with bitter hatred of the accursed hypocrisies of civilised society which, in the names of Law and Religion, had been crushing the life out of the sweetest and purest woman on earth, merely because she wished to be "mistress of herself and sovereign of her soul."

What did I care about the future of the world? Or the movement of divine truths? Or the new relations of man and woman in the good time that was to come? Or the tremendous problems of lost and straying womanhood, or the sufferings of neglected children, or the tragedies of the whole girlhood of the world? What did I care about anything but my poor martyred darling? The woman God gave me was mine and I could not give her up—not now, after all she had gone through.

Sometime in the afternoon (heaven knows when) I went back to Sunny Lodge. The house was very quiet. Baby was babbling on the hearth-rug. My mother was silent and trying not to let me see her swollen eyes. My dear one was sleeping, had been sleeping all day long, the sleep of an angel. Strange and frightening fact, nobody being able to remember that she had ever been seen to sleep before!

After a while, sick and cold at heart, I went down to the shore where we had played as children. The boat we sailed in was moored on the beach. The tide was far out, making a noise on the teeth of the Rock, which stood out against the reddening sky, stern, grand, gloomy.

Old Tommy the Mate came to the door of his cabin. I went into the quiet smoky place with its earthen floor and sat in a dull torpor by the hearth, under the sooty "laff" and rafters. The old man did not say a word to me. He put some turf on the fire and then sat on a three-legged stool at the other side of the hearth-place.

Once he got up and gave me a basin of buttermilk, then stirred the peats and sat down again without speaking. Towards evening, when the rising sea was growing louder, I got up to go. The old man followed me to the door, and there, laying his hand on my arm he said:

"She's been beating to windward all her life, boy. But mind ye this—*she's fetching the harbour all right at last.*"

Going up the road I heard a band of music in the distance, and saw a procession of people coming down. It was Father Dan's celebration of thanksgiving to God for what was left of Daniel O'Neill's ill-gotten wealth sent back from Rome for the poor.

Being in no humour to thank God for anything, I got over a sod hedge and crossed a field until I came to a back gate to our garden, near to "William Rufus's" burial place—stone overgrown with moss, inscription almost obliterated.

On the path I met my mother, with baby toddling and tumbling by her side.

"How is she now?" I asked.

She was awake—had been awake these two hours, but in a strange kind of wakefulness, her big angel eyes open and shining like stars as if smiling at someone whom nobody else could see, and her lips moving as if speaking some words which nobody else could hear.

"What art thou saying, *boght millish?*" my mother had asked, and after a moment in which she seemed to listen in rapture, my darling had answered:

"Hush! I am speaking to mamma—telling her I am leaving Isabel with Christian Ann. And she is saying she is very glad."

We walked round to the front of the house until we came close under the window of "Mary O'Neil's little room," which was wide open.

The evening was so still that we could hear the congregation singing in the church and on the path in front of it.

Presently somebody began to sing in the room above. It was my darling—in her clear sweet silvery voice which I have never heard the like of in this world and never shall again.

After a moment another voice joined hers—a deep voice, the Reverend Mother's.

All else was quiet. Not a sound on earth or in the air. A hush had fallen on the sea itself, which seemed to be listening for my precious darling's last breath. The sun was going down, very red in its setting, and the sky was full of glory.

When the singing came to an end baby was babbling in my mother's arms—"Bo-loo-la-la-ma-ma." I took her and held her up to the open window, crying:

"Look, darling! Here's Girlie!"

There was no answer, but after another moment the Reverend Mother came to the window. Her pale face was even paler than usual, and her lips trembled. She did not speak, but she made the sign of the Cross.

And by that . . . I knew.

"Out of the depths I cry unto thee, O Lord, Lord, hear my cry."

THE AUTHOR TO THE READER

I saw him off at Tilbury when he left England on his last Expedition. Already he was his own man once more. After the blinding, stunning effect of the great event there had been a quick recuperation. His spirit had risen to a wonderful strength and even a certain cheerfulness.

I did not find it hard to read the secret of this change. It was not merely that Time, the great assuager, had begun to do its work with him, but that he had brought himself to accept without qualm or question Mary O'Neill's beautiful belief (the old, old belief) in the immortality of personal love, and was firmly convinced that, freed from the imprisonment of the flesh, she was with him every day and hour, and that as long as he lived she always would be.

There was nothing vague, nothing fantastic, nothing mawkish, nothing unmanly about this belief, but only the simple faith of a steady soul and a perfectly clear brain. It was good to see how it braced a strong man for life to face Death in that way.

As for his work I found him quite hopeful. His mission apart, I thought he was looking forward to his third trip to the Antarctic, in expectation of the silence and solitude of that strengthening region.

As I watched the big liner that was taking him away disappear down the Thames I had no more doubt that he would get down to the South Pole, and finish his task there, than that the sun would rise the following morning.

Whatever happens this time he will "march breast forward."

MARTIN CONRAD TO THE AUTHOR

WIRELESS—ANTARCTIC CONTINENT (*via* MACQUARIE ISLAND AND RADIO HOBART 16).

Arrived safe. All well. Weather excellent. Blue sky. Warm. Not a breath of wind. Sun never going down. Constellations revolving without dipping. Feel as if we can see the movement of the world. Start south to-morrow. Calmer than I have ever been since She was taken from me. But She was right. She is here. "Love is stronger than death, many waters cannot quench it."

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